The 'subject-effects' of gyms : studying the interactional, sociospatial and performative order of the fitness site

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and performative order of the fitness site

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A thesis submitted in partial requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Birkbeck College, University of London

March 2015

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Abstract

This thesis explores the 'subject-effects' of fitness gyms by investigating how the gym's interactional, sociospatial and performative order informs participants' sense of self and the ways in which they relate to their bodies. The thesis engages predominantly with the following theories: Foucault's concept of heterotopia, Goffman's theorization of total institutions and Scott's elaboration of it as well as Bourdieu's notion of habitus. Adopting a psychosocial framework, it is argued that these theories are more productive for the present study when their scope is widened to the level of subjective experiences, affects and relationships. A variety of methods were utilized in this study: a multi-sited participant observation in three London gyms including a small-scale analysis of gym advertisements, thirty-two semi-structured interviews with gym participants, and an analysis of online blogs and fitness handbooks. Four interrelated subject-effects of the gym were identified: first, material practices employed at gyms are tied into discourses of effectiveness and productivity through which bodies are conceptualized as open to strategic manipulation, control and power. On an affective level, this may generate feelings of mastery but also anxiety and discomfort amongst gym users. Second, gyms promote the idea that training brings about happiness, self-satisfaction and emotional resilience. These ideas are taken up by most participants who state that they gain a greater sense of control through their gym training and feel self-contented. Third, gyms afford their users with a sense of individuality which lets them feel 'special'. However, whilst there is a constant emphasis on members' uniqueness in terms of their own, distinctive body and its 'needs', there is also the impetus to compare, contrast, to look and to be like the others which produces subtle forms of rivalry. Four, belonging to a gym expresses and affirms participants' sense of self in a way that harmonizes with neoliberal imperatives on the self as an enterprise. The gym invites participants to be self-responsible, self-reliant and constantly becoming.

key words: gym, body, discourse, space, subjectivities

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my doctoral supervisors Dr Derek Hook and Professor Sasha Roseneil for their support and for giving me directions and insightful comments over the course of the past four years. Furthermore, I am grateful to Professor Cathy Campbell and Professor Sandra Jovchelovitch from the London School of Economics and Political Science for their comments on my work during the early stages. I would also like to thank my upgrade panel committee, Dr Lisa Baraitser and Dr Yasmeen Narayan, as well as Professor Lynne Segal and Dr Amber Jacobs at Birkbeck, University of London. Participating in the Doctoral Research Seminar at the Department of Psychosocial Studies and the Graduate Seminar in Social Research at the Birkbeck Institute for Social Research was particularly helpful in completing this thesis and I would like to thank my fellow doctoral students for their contributions to my work. Finally, I would like to thank Chris Milnes for proofreading my thesis.

Preface: entering the gym

Just to clarify, this isn't a book about hating exercise. Although I can't say it's a book about loving it either. Rather it is a book about a deeply complicated, borderline hostile relationship with a place I like to call the origin for all feelings of inadequacy. That's right folks. We're talking about the gym.

(Kaminsky, 2005, p.1)

Whether in the basement of a commercial complex, half-hidden between two corner stores, next to the tube station or on a wide green field in the suburbs, gyms have conquered urban space. What is perhaps most striking when one enters the gym for the first time is the overwhelming presence of machines (that a friend of mine once called 'modern instruments of torture'), the countless mirrors on the walls, the glass cabinets filled with fitness products, and the many sweaty bodies engaged in quick, repetitious movements. The social order one is so used to and familiar with seems to be working differently in this place. Only a few gym users seem to talk to each other, most do not even take up eye contact – except with their own reflection on one of the huge mirrors that seem to be everywhere at the gym. The gym has certainly a huge appeal for many; there must be a reason why so many people spend time at the gym, engaging in hard body work, even after long hours of paid labour and at the weekends. The fitness gym can perhaps be called a 'symptom' of our (post-) modern times in a sense that it has a certain function – a function that may not be so obvious at first sight.

The task I set myself in this research project is to understand more of the 'gym-phenomenon'. I chose the quote above as the opening passage as it alludes to two crucial aspects of the gym experience that I would like to shed light on in this thesis: first, I want to look at the different ways of knowing, experiencing and relating to the body and the self that the gym discursively produces. Feelings of inadequacy, hostility and hate listed in the extract above are certainly extreme reactions that not every gym user might have. However, they point to the affective dimension of the gym experience, something that I would also like to grapple with in this research. Relatedly, I want to understand more of this "relation with that

place", that is, the sociospatial and material practices employed at the gym and people's involvement herein. More precisely, my work addresses two main research questions:

(1) What discourses – understood as certain ways of knowing, experiencing and relating to the body and the self – are generated in and through the spatial, material and social practices of the gym?

(2) How do these socio-spatially and materially anchored discourses unfold within the subjective experience of gym attendees? How does discourse imbue subjectivities and yield affective responses?

Thesis Outline

In **Chapter 1** I introduce and contextualize the topic of this study by providing a brief history and background of the use of fitness gyms. I then present a review of the literature and I suggest that a study of spatially situated practices, interactions and performances can advance our understanding of how the gym works as a site in which certain *ways of being* are discursively generated.

Chapter 2 and **Chapter 3** provide the theoretical foundations of this project, beginning in Chapter 2 with a conceptualization of discourse that prioritizes its material over its textual, or representational, register. My aim is to show how the gym's subject-effects and its bodily, material and spatial dimensions can be studied through a Foucault-inspired discourse analysis. However, in order to grapple with the experiential anchoring and affective dimensions of discursive formations I suggest expanding the conventional scope of discourse analysis. Chapter 3 elaborates on the role and importance of space within such a widened discourse analytic framework. Here I draw on Turner's (1987, [1969]) notion of liminality and of Foucault's concept of heterotopia and argue that these concepts provide useful analytical vocabularies for the present study. I further discuss Goffman's (1961) notion of the total institution and his performative 'micro-sociology' as well as Scott's (2011) concept of 'Re-inventive Institutions'. Both authors foreground the bodily and spatial dimensions of human interaction, and conceptualize the effects of spatial practices on people's sense of self.

In **Chapter 4**, I describe my methodological approach to the study of gym spaces. I discuss my reasons for using participant observation, semi-structured interviews, online blogs and handbooks and explain how they speak to the goals of this project. In this chapter I also describe my process of site selection, participant recruitment, observations in the field, interview methods, and data analysis. I provide descriptions of each observation site. Finally, I discuss ethical concerns and reflect on my own position as a researcher.

Chapters 5 to **8** present the empirical findings of the thesis. In **Chapter 5** I explore the socio-spatial and temporal specificities of the gym site. My analysis detects a general sense amongst participants that the gym turns them into strong, efficient and productive beings. Both gym goers and promotional materials take up the idea that training at the gym renders participants more 'prepared' for demanding situations in everyday life. Relatedly, gym exercise is believed to lead to increased psychological well-being, helping participants to tackle emotionally difficult life situations more successfully. I show that these discourses of effectiveness, productivity and happiness are mediated by the working principles of gym equipment, most notably the treadmill and the weight machine, and ultimately evoke feelings of mastery and self-content.

In **Chapter 6** I shift my analytical lenses to the relational dynamics between gym participants and their trainers. Here I look at two specific encounters in which embodied interactions take place, namely during the induction to the gym and personal training. What becomes evident is that during both encounters, primacy is granted to what can be called a 'personalisation' of fitness training: first, various discursive techniques produce the gym user as an individual by presupposing and substantiating the idea of uniqueness. Second, personal training reinforces a certain intimacy between trainers and trainees, evoking a sense of mutuality, care and concern for one another.

Chapter 7 examines the role of 'others' at the gym and analyses the fitness site's interactional and performative dimensions on the gym floor, the group exercise class and the changing room. I argue here that certain bodily enactments and ways of dressing function as warrants against potential embarrassments, both of one's

self and of the other. Changing rooms are crucial sub-spaces within the gym, causing even more body-related anxiety. A second area I focus upon in this chapter is gendered patterns of exercise. Here, I analyse both the spatial segmentation of one particular fitness club as well as a popular gym advertisement as two typical cases, suggesting that the gym produces normalizing effects in terms of sexuality, desire and the performance of femininities.

Chapter 8 discusses the extent to which the gym can be regarded as a 'technology of the self', that is, part of a self-project. Gym exercise necessarily means body-work, and therefore, is always work upon the self but, as I argue in this chapter, going to the gym *qua* leisure activity can itself be a way of confirming and expressing one's sense of self. Going to the gym is more than a lifestyle choice: it is a certain stylization of life, a preoccupation with what may be called the 'arts of living and being', substantiating one's sense of self, also in relation to social status and class. It is argued that the gym is part of the neoliberal condition where 'becoming' is strongly promoted and working upon the self is regarded as a desirable activity.

In the final **Chapter 9**, I move away from a discussion of the materiality of the gym and the specific socio-spatial practices therein. I summarize, contextualize and discuss the findings of this study in a wider context and re-address my research questions. I outline my contribution to the literature and discuss some of the challenges and tensions I have encountered during my research. Finally, I suggest future directions to develop and expand upon the work presented here.

Notes on terms and style

I would like to define several key terms unique to the fitness industry and/or my use of them, as they are vital to an understanding of the setting and the activities therein. To start with, the colloquial term 'gym' refers to fitness sites providing a range of fitness equipment, classes, and other amenities for a fee. The terms 'fitness centre', 'fitness club' or 'health club' are all used synonymously in this thesis. Further, 'cardiovascular equipment' is used to describe machines such as treadmills, stationary bicycles, ellipticals (machines on which the exerciser stands

on two large pedals but engages in a motion that is a cross between stepping and cycling) or stairsteppers (machines that imitate stair climbing) whilst 'free weights' include dumbbells, barbells or weight plates. In terms of style, it should be added that I use inverted commas to draw attention to the discursive construction of an 'object'. It goes without saying that notions such as race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality are socio-historical constructions and some scholars would also consider it appropriate to use inverted commas each time they are used. However, I have refrained from doing so as writing this way would have been highly interruptive. This does not mean that in those instances where inverted commas have not been used, there is a 'natural' given-ness of any of these terms. Lastly, I use *italics* in three instances: when I refer to a concept that has been introduced by an author for the first time (e.g. *total institution*), when I want to emphasize a notion or an idea, or when I mark the use of a foreign word as the convention demands (e.g. *per se* or *qua*). In chapters 5 to 8, when I cite interviewees, I indicate their age and occupation in brackets. A full list of the interviewees with more details is provided in Appendix A. One last point concerning style involves the use of gendered nouns and pronouns. In my own writing I have always used "he or she" together and tried to remain as gender-neutral as possible in my use of language. In citations where only the male pronoun or noun is used by the author, such as "men", "mankind" etc., I have put a (sic) right behind the word. Conventionally, (sic) alludes to grammatical or spelling errors in the primary text, in this case I used it as a marker of a *socio-political* error and hope that - although the wide use of (sic) may be interruptive at times - the sensitive reader will welcome my choice.

1

The exercising body at the gym: a review of literature

This chapter is intended to introduce and contextualize the topic of this study and to provide the rationale for the psychosocial framework employed in this project. The first part provides a brief history and background of the contemporary fitness gym. Following this, three distinct yet overlapping strands in the literature are presented. Since body-work is at the core of all gym activities it is not surprising that the literature tends to focus on the exercising body herein. More precisely, the exercising body is discussed (a) as a site of production in late-modern, post-industrial societies, (b) as a path to perfection and self-mastery, (c) as a performance and inscription of femininities and masculinities. In the second part of this chapter, I argue that a psychosocially informed discursive framework will help us to address the question of how subjectivities unfold in and through the social and material domain of the gym and inform people's subjective experiences.

1.1 Mapping the fitness gym

It is not easy to determine a "starting point" in the history of the contemporary gym and its antecedents. One root can be found in ancient Greece, in the large public spaces designated for free-born men to carry out daily physical exercise. The *gymnasium* (Greek word *gumnos*: naked; *gumnazein*: exercise naked, see Kah & Scholz, 2004) was not only a place for social interaction, recreation and leisure, but it was first and foremost an educational institution, a place where the intellectual and athletic training of a military character was supposed to be accomplished (Forbes 1945; Luke, 2012; Kah & Scholz, 2004). The gymnasium was especially a popular recreational space for the aristocratic class as it provided them with an opportunity to perform "one's own outstanding persona and family" (Kah and Scholz, 2004, p.14, translation of the author). As Luke (2012) notes, after the ancient Greeks, gyms seem to have disappeared for centuries in Europe. The interconnectedness between physical training and intellectual education persisted, most arguably with the introduction of physical education first in schools' curricula and later in many of the universities of 18th and 19th century

Europe (Rice et al., 1969). It has been noted that one of the main motifs for implementing sport lessons in schools' curricula was to "strengthen the vitality of their respective nations" (Laker, 2003, p.X). Although a comprehensive history of the contemporary gym cannot be provided here, it should be noted that whilst the first indoor gymnasiums for the male public were built in Finland and Germany in the 19th century already, the emergence of fitness as an industry, as a consumer product, can be traced to the United States of the mid-1970s. As a study of the US Yellow Pages in 1975 reveals, the notion of "gymnasiums" by this time had been replaced by (non-chain) private "health clubs" (Smith-Maguire, 2007). The goal of these health clubs was to create a space that offered atmosphere and ambience, including pleasant equipment and décor, rather than a space that only catered to weightlifting, muscle-building men. According to Stern (2008), there were 3,000 private health clubs in the United States by 1978, with amenities such steam rooms, group exercise classes, juice bars, cafés, cardio machines, swimming pools, tanning booths etc.

By the 1980s gyms had established themselves as part of a white, middle-class consumer culture in Western societies and can now be said to be a vital feature of the Western lifestyle. Nowadays, every European and North American city, and even small town, seem to have at least one fitness gym. According to the State of the UK Fitness Industry Report, in 2013 almost 13% of the UK population was registered as members of a private health and fitness gym or a publicly-owned fitness facility, with London having the most registered users (EHFA, 2013). In the 1980s, when the gym trend started, there were 200 gyms in the UK whilst today there are approximately 6000 fitness facilities across the country. They vary in location, membership fees and serve different social and economic milieus. A lot of gyms are in the city centre and are mostly at their busiest during lunch time and after work hours. Others are in residential areas, with a lifestyle or family oriented concept, offering child care or weekend activities. In order to attract customers, most gyms offer more than a plain and functional working out environment. Depending on the size and the target group, multi-purpose amenities do not offer only sports facilities but also pre- or post-training activities, for example at their spas and beauty centres or in cafés and restaurants. The fitness gym seems to be a place that, increasingly, discards the Cartesian division

between 'body and soul' and calls instead for a holistic view of the subject, offering organized social activities and even containing 'therapeutic landscapes', such as physiotherapy and psychotherapeutic counselling. As Bryman (2004) states, 'hybrid consumption', that is, consumption of several goods and services within one single place, tends to extend the time spent by the customers there. Consequently, one may think that the more time gym users spend at their gym, the more they engage with its material and social environment, and the more they are affected by the same, so that the gym becomes more than 'just' a training site for them.

The gym in the social science literature

There is a large body of social scientific literature that deals with the intersection of sport, culture and society. It would require more space than I can provide here to engage with this extensive field of enquiry. To state briefly though, key themes in this area that Dart (2014) has identified through a content analysis of three leading journals across 25 years (*International Review for the Sociology of Sport, Journal of Sport and Social Issues* and *Sociology of Sport Journa*l) are as follows: the relationship between gender, sex and sexuality and sport participation, race/ethnicity, sport and education, sport in the media, sport and politics and economy and globalization and sport. Dart (2014) states that the relationship between sport and religion, disability, the family, the environment, and work/employment are less often researched. The dominant sports that are dealt with are football (soccer), basketball, baseball and rugby – all sports that involve teams. Gym exercise is not mentioned once in Dart's review paper, which suggests that the gym is rather a marginal research topic.

Indeed, excluding studies that focus on bodybuilding, little empirical research has been conducted on and in commercial gyms. To my knowledge, in the social sciences literature there are only three substantive scholarly monographs in English dedicated to the analysis of gyms (Spielvogel, 2000; Smith- McGuire, 2008; Sassatelli 2010). A substantive body of work on gyms deals with people's motivation to go to the gym (Crossley, 2006; Dworkin, 2003; Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Laverty and Wright, 2010; Stern, 2008; Stewart, Smith & Moroney, 2013). It is argued that one of the main motifs is the desire to achieve a certain shape that

mirrors contemporary aesthetic ideals (e.g. Dworkin, 2003). Crossley (2006) states, that for some participants the gym is an escape from everyday life where people can "turn off consciousness and submerse themselves in exercise" (Crossley, 2006, p. 43). Gym exercise, he further explains, is as a form of relaxation and release, it provides gym-users with an opportunity to combat stress, to reduce aggression and increase energy levels. Laverty and Wright (2010) assert that going to the gym may provide individuals with a heightened sense of morality as going to the gym is in itself "a demonstration of desire to be a good citizen, to achieve and practice individual health responsibilities" (Laverty & Wright, 2010, p. 79).

Besides the abovementioned empirical studies on gyms , the gym is frequently mentioned within the wider social science literature, and here especially within sociology, where it is identified as a widely employed leisure pursuit in contemporary Western societies (Featherstone, 2010; Howson, 2013; Phillips, 2005; Shilling, 2005, 2008, 2012; Stebbins, 2009). These works tend to employ gym and fitness related activities as empirical support for theoretical elaborations by demonstrating how gyms – amongst other leisure places – are manifestations of broader social and cultural phenomena such as consumerist or managerial practices that 'infiltrate' the relation to one's body. In the present work, I am not only interested in how societal discourses enter the gym but also how gym attendees subjectivize those discourses through the ways in which they know, experience and relate to themselves and their bodies. By the same token, I am also interested in the affects that the gym engenders. As I will show in the last part of this chapter, a psychosocial framework will assist us here for it allows us to think the 'subjective' and the 'social' as inseparable (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008; Frosh, 2003; Roseneil, 2006). In the following, I shall first present three distinct yet overlapping analytical frameworks within the literature on the gym and then discuss to which extent these accounts can be taken forward within a psychosocial framework.

1.2 The exercising body as a site of production

One way of making sense of the contemporary gym trend is to ask why it is that so many people, often after long hours of paid work, voluntarily participate in body-work that can be said to be routinized, mechanical or 'dictated' by machines and calorie-counting, instead of engaging with more creative, sociable or playful activities. One answer is that the logics of paid labour have infiltrated leisure time in general and the relationship to one's body in particular (e.g. Rojek, 1985; P. Miller and Rose, 1997; Smith Maguire, 2008a, 2008b). Baudrillard (1998) is one of the best-known advocates of this approach, arguing that the way in which individuals' relations to their bodies is organized in a society mirrors the ways in which social relations and the relation to things are organized. He argues that private property and the accumulation of capital as the key tenets of capitalism are applied to the physical sphere, too: individuals understand their bodies as 'things' that can be invested in, worked-upon and optimized.

One classical sociologist whose theory has influenced sociologists' thinking about the body is Max Weber. In the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2002 [1904-5]) Weber argues that the Calvinist idea of the 'calling' has paved the way for modern capitalism. The idea of predestination, he argues, has produced a deep insecurity which manifested itself in a high motivation to lead disciplined and dedicated lives on earth. The hard working body, in other words, was a form of guarantee for heavenly salvation. What followed was a voluntary subjugation of the body to strict routine, hard work and effort in the sphere of production and a rejection of the sensuous in the sphere of consumption or sexuality. Intellectual trajectories that draw parallels between modes of production and people's relationships to their bodies or, in Marxian terms, between base and superstructure, can be traced back to what Turner (1991) calls the marginalized, almost 'secret' preoccupation with the body in the works of Engels, too. In his writing, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1969 [1843]), Engels draws on medical reports to categorize bodily conditions by occupation and industry. Mill hands in Yorkshire and Lancashire, for example, are characterized by malformation of the spine, "the knees were bent inward, the ligaments very often relaxed and enfeebled, and the long bones of the legs bent" (Engels, 1969

[1843], p. 268). The bodies of London dress makers are described by Engels as follows:

> Enervation, exhaustion, debility, loss of appetite, pains in the shoulders, back and hips, but especially headache, begin very soon; then follow curvatures of the spine, high, deformed shoulders, leanness, swelled, weeping, and smarting eyes, which soon become short-sighted; coughs, narrow chests, and shortness of breath, and all manner of disorders in the development of the female organism. (Engels, 1969, p. 238)

Engels description of the workers' bodies stems from what might today be called a multi-sited observational study that he undertook in a series of factories in North England. He depicted men, women and children separately and argued that the same labour process may leave different traces on the female or male and young or mature body, respectively. It is worthwhile to note, and perhaps not surprising at all, that gender distinctions come into play very quickly when the body is being discussed. As we continue, we will see that gender also becomes paramount when the topic of exercise is being discussed.

Habitus and bodily hexis

Synnott (2002) notes that Engel's understanding of the body as an instrument of repression, producing particular forms of physique, pain, pathology and, ultimately, death, was later developed further by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1979)[1], and we might add, by Bourdieu (1990). To reiterate, for Engels the body in the industrial society is as an instrument of production, and, at the same time, bears the marks of this very production process. In a way, the body is understood as the site in which the dialectical relationship between society and the individual is played out. One can easily recognize similarities between Engels and Foucault's notion of the 'bodily trace', that is, the bodily inscription of power (see Chapter 3 for discussion of these terms), as well as Bourdieu's (1990) concept of

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[1] And indeed, the lines by Engels cited above bear strong resemblance with Foucault's description of the corporeal inscription of discipline to be found in a typical soldier of the late 18th century (1995, p.135f). To clarify, however, in contrast to Engels, Foucault's main points of reference are not the capitalist modes of production, class struggle or the economic base from which social practices and consciousness emanate (for a discussion of Foucault and his relationship to historical materialism, see Olssen, 2004).

the 'bodily hexis' by which the relationship becomes manifest between individual practices and social class and gender.[2] 'Bodily hexis' is:

> political mythology realized, em-bodied, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby feeling and thinking…The principles em-bodied in this way are played beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched voluntarily, deliberate transformation, cannot even be made explicit…the body is the site of incorporated history. (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 69-70)

'Hexis' is used by Bourdieu to indicate that the way people 'carry themselves' and inhabit their bodies is a political matter[3]. One of Bourdieu's most well-known examples in relation to the gendered body is the deportment of men and women in Kabylia (a region in North Algeria), where the politics of gender are reflected and negotiated in ways of walking, looking and even standing still. Whilst women tend to orient their bodies and gaze to the ground, men move upward and outward. It should be noted that in Bourdieusian thinking, gender is seen as an essential part of someone's habitus, or, put differently, habitus is always gendered.

Although Bourdieu engages with issues of gender, his primary focus remains on social class. As Jenkins (1996) writes, Bourdieu has repeatedly admitted his debt to Marxian thinking, which is perhaps most evident in his concept of the habitus – a concept that claims that bodily characteristics and embodied actions reflect and reproduce class relations, mostly on a *non-conscious* level. The reason habitus is considered durable and resistant to change, Bourdieu claims, is because it is acquired by individuals during early infancy; it is instilled tacitly, that is, by experience and not by explicit teaching of rules and codes of behaviour. Its persistence, in other words, stems from its thoughtlessness, with subjects who "do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing, that what they do has more meaning than they know" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 35). Important to note here is that

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[2] A direct comparison between Bourdieu and Engels runs the risk of over-simplifying the authors' complex theoretical trajectories. It is important to note, for example, that in contrast to Engels (and to Marx, for that matter), Bourdieu's conceptualization of 'social class' is not defined "solely by a position in the relations of production, but by the class habitus which is 'normally' (i.e., with a high statistical probability) associated with that position" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 372).

[3] Bourdieu borrows the notion of 'hexis' [=acquired disposition, Greek] from Marcel Mauss who himself bases his account on Aristotle. 'Habitus' is the Latin word for 'hexis' (Crossley, 2013).

the notions of habitus and bodily hexis do not only refer to actions but also, as the citation above alludes to, inculcated ways of thinking and feeling. To grasp the concept's wide scope, it is necessary to insert a caveat here: 'Habitus' should not be confounded with 'habit'. In a footnote to *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu writes that one of the reasons why he uses the notion of 'habitus' and not 'habit' is because the latter alludes to a "mechanical assembly or preformed programme" whilst habitus signifies purposive action that might require intelligence, strategic thinking, understanding and a know-how (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 218, note 47). Crossley (2013) puts is succinctly, when he says that habitus requires:

> the skilled activity of the expert player rather than the conditioned response of the lab rat…To acquire habitus is to acquire means of knowing, handling and dealing with the world. (Crossley, 2003, p.139)

Albeit the attempt to liberate the term 'habitus' from the mechanical connotations that the term 'habit' possibly invokes, Bourdieu's concept is nonetheless heavily criticized for being deterministic, too 'rigid', allowing almost no space in his theory for human agency and social change to occur (see Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, 135ff., for a discussion). Perhaps to anticipate such a critique, in *Distinction* Bourdieu (1984) distinguished between 'primary habitus' and 'secondary habitus'. Whilst primary habitus is indeed conceptualized as durable, bodily dispositions one acquires in early childhood mainly through embodied and affective experience, secondary habitus is 'learnt' in later stages in life and is therefore malleable to some extent. Bourdieu writes:

> Habitus changes constantly as a function of new experiences. Dispositions are subject to a sort of permanent revision, but one that is never radical, given that it operates on the basis of premises instituted in the previous state. They are characterized by a combination of constancy and variation that fluctuates according to the individual and her degree of rigidity or flexibility (Bourdieu, 2000, p.161)

The primary habitus has preeminence; it functions as a springboard for later acquired dispositions. In the context of athleticism and exercise, for example, Wacquant (2014) argues that sporting habitus is grounded in and mediated through primary habitus. He extends Bourdieu's concept and claims that there are even tertiary, quaternary and quinary forms of habitus whilst in all cases, primary habitus functions as a "motivative resource and a built-in hindrance to gaining the practical mastery of a corporeal craft" (Wacquant, 2014, p. 7). For Bourdieu, the very ways in which people treat and relate to their bodies reveal the "deepest dispositions of the habitus" (1984, p. 190). Here, Bourdieu enables us to think of entry and exist on a micro-practical level; rather than looking for physical manifestations of barriers we can start locating exclusionary practices on a more embodied level. Taking up Bourdieu's qualification of the habitus as incalculated ways of feeling, Wacquant makes another interesting contribution to Bourdieu's theory by suggesting that habitus has an affective, or libidinal component[4]; habitus "entail[s] the vesting of one's life energies into the objects, undertakings, and agents that populate the world under consideration", he writes (Wacquant, 2014, p. 9). This is why he proposes that social scientists should not delimit themselves to a sociology of the body but rather engage in "a sociology *from* the body". What he suggests is a carnal, or visceral, mode of inquiry where the body of the researcher functions as a methodological tool (Wacquant, 2005).

The present study is not primarily intended to analyze the relationship between class and bodily hexis or habitus. However, it will be vital to note how participants employ their bodies in the fitness gym – not because someone told them to do so but because they have acquired the "feel for the game". By the same token, I will examine to what extent gym practice can be seen as a 'secondary habitus' that invokes certain ways of feeling and thinking. Taking Wacquant's methodological prompts about the visceral modes of inquiry seriously, it will also be crucial to take my own bodily engagement in the field as well as my affective involvement into account, too. Indeed, Wacquant's suggestions speak directly to one of the key tenets of psychosocial research, namely the 'experience-near' approach that "reaches beyond and below the text", with a "focus on the

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[4] By 'libidinal', Wacquant explicitly draws on Freudian vocabulary, which extends the original concept of the habitus to drives and/or the dynamic unconscious.

experiences of subjects… as people engage with and make meaning out of their situations, and actions" and taking into account "the intersubjective action of emotion in generating meaning here … often registered in an embodied fashion" (Hollway 2009, p.461f). My subjective experience in the field will therefore be central to the analysis of the gym's subject-effects.

Investing into the body

When Wacquant stresses the affective components of habitus, he identifies Marx as the intellectual antecedent: The "lustful dimension of habitus formation", Wacquant asserts, was "highlighted by Marx (1988 [1927]) in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844" (Wacquant, 2014, p.9, italics added). However, Wacquant continues, this dimension was "suppressed by social science ever since, that the incarnate social agent is a suffering and desiring animal" (Wacquant, 2014, p.9). Another conceptual similarity between Bourdieu and Marx that I would like to single out involves Bourdieu's idea of the body as a form of *capital*. Capital is qualified by Bourdieu (1986) as the accumulation of labour in a wider sense, exceeding the boundaries of economic theory and including immaterial labour as it is accumulated in the realm of social and cultural life. Examples of *cultural capital* are education, intellect, ways of speaking and dressing, or physical appearance (e.g. muscular physique or suntan). The accumulation of cultural capital requires "investment, above all of time, but also of than socially constituted form of libido, *libido sciendi*, with all the privation renunciation, and the sacrifice that it may entail." (Bourdieu, 1986, p.83). *Social capital* describes one's membership in a group; it "is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 87). Again, like cultural capital, social capital is never given for once and for all but requires continuous labour.

Bourdieu's model of capital accumulation is one of the most referenced frameworks in the gym literature (Frew & McGillivray, 2005; Tulle & Dorrer 2012; Turner, 2000; Stewart, Smith & Moroney, 2013). Marx (2000 [1872]) who took Engels' thoughts further, when he spoke of the "crippling of body and mind" in capitalist societies, famously argued that bodies are regarded as a "means of

production", noting further that they possess economic value just like steam, water or mule-power. As mentioned above, Bourdieu, too, makes a strong case for politicizing and historicizing the body, underlining social class as the most distinguishing factor therein. He argues that the working classes tend to develop an *instrumental* relationship to their bodies because they need a strong physicality to sustain their productivity and have restricted leisure time that simply does not allow for a comprehensive preoccupation with the body. Members of the bourgeoisie, on the other hand, are not overtly interested in a strong body but prefer a slim, muscular physicality "suited to a world in which economic practice is constituted more strongly by the presentation of the self" (Wilkes, 1990, p. 118).

With the decline of heavy industry, one can question whether Bourdieu's observations are still valid. However, for Bourdieu, *physical capital* is, like cultural capital and social capital (acquaintances and social 'skills'), an asset that affords individuals greater success in the "market." Like any other form of capital, the ability to acquire physical capital depends on one's ability to access certain resources. The fitness gym can be said to be such a resource, providing an ideal space for the attainment of both physical and cultural capital, for gym training does not only yield a desirable physique but the gym itself may also be an indicator of a certain lifestyle (Frew & McGillivray, 2005; Maguire, 2007). Some exclusive health clubs also seem to guarantee an accumulation of social capital by making access to certain social networks possible. This is why Shilling goes so far as to claim that there must be other reasons why people continue to go to the gym, subject themselves to permanent dissatisfaction, discipline, self-criticism and the gaze of others, even if their physical capital does not increase.

Bourdieu does not only allow us to think about how body types vary across social classes and how the accumulation of capital determines people's thinking and feeling. He also theorizes how physical activities themselves can be distinguished according to social class. The upper classes of the 1970s and early 1980s, according to Bourdieu (1978, 1984), tended to engage in physical activities that required financial means such as golf, yachting, shooting or polo, whilst working class members engaged more in team sports or martial arts. It should be noted,

however, that whilst bodily aspirations might differ across social classes, fitness gyms in the UK have become affordable to most members of society. Looking at the variance of membership fees with prices ranging from £15 to £150, the different locations, services, architecture, design etc. gyms themselves can be said to be speaking to different social classes. Also, as Shilling (2012) critically remarks, one can find fine differentiations in terms of preoccupations with the body *within* social classes: whilst mobile middle class members in finance or the service industry tend to visit fitness gyms to enjoy effort itself, according to Shilling (2012), professionals in the field of cultural production combine fitness with more 'distinctive' activities such as mountaineering or walking in remote places. Bourdieu's ideas resonate with contemporary critics of body optimizing practices who claim that in consumer culture the body as such is considered as capital and hence treated as a project. Society:

> …encourages the individual to adopt instrumental strategies to combat deterioration and decay (applauded by state bureaucracies who seek to reduce health costs by educating the public against bodily neglect) and combines it with the notion that the body is a vehicle of pleasure and self-expression. (Featherstone, 1982, p. 170)

Fitness, according to this line of thought, is far from being playful or disengaged but a strategy to enhance the body's qualities and value in the social and economic market, where it is surveyed by the gaze of the other (Frew & McGillivray, 2005; Turner, 2000; Sassatelli, 1999). Frew and McGillivray (2005), for example, argue that the logics of the free-market in general, and neoliberalism in particular have exceeded the economic sphere and are now internalized by individuals[5]. According to the authors, neoliberalism is believed to be more than a global

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[5] To clarify, 'neoliberalism' refers to a political economic theory which is globally put into practice since the late 70s. Neoliberal thinking rests on the premise that markets are most efficient when they regulate themselves. It is believed that economic prosperity and human well-being can be maximized through strong private property rights and free trade. The role and impact of the state, according to neoliberal thought, should therefore be minimized to the preservation of such rights and practices. The policies that follow from such a theory comprise privatization of formerly public goods and services as well as deregulation of national and global economies. Neoliberalism is believed to be more than an economic principle but a 'way of thinking' with effects on the social world, that is to say, effects on people's way of relating to another and to themselves (Harvey, 2005). The UK Government's concept of the so-called 'Big Society' is regarded as a continuation of neoliberal agendas, an "attempt to 'roll back' the activities of the state and encourage citizens to take control of and responsibility for their own welfare (…) passing responsibility and power from State to citizen to deliver community and welfare services" (Such, 2013, p.91).

economic principle but a 'way of thinking' that has effects on the social world, that is, on how people relate to another and to themselves. Its logics permeate many aspect of everyday life and also the relationship to one's own body and the bodies of others. Baudrillard (1998), for example, claims that today's neoliberal societies are saturated by practices such as management, control, marketing and 'narcissistic investment', which:

> orchestrated as a mystique of liberation and accomplishment, [are] in fact always simultaneously an investment of an efficient, competitive, economic type. The body 'appropriated' in this way is reappropriated first to meet 'capitalist' objectives: in other words, where it is invested, it is invested in order to produce a yield. The body is not reappropriated for the autonomous needs of the subject, but in terms of a normative *principle* of enjoyment and hedonistic profitability, in terms of an enforced instrumentality that is indexed to the code and the norms of a society production and managed consumption. (Baudrillard, 1998, p.131, emphasis in original)

In this vein, fitness gyms could be read as ideological sites in which "false consciousness", and "false needs and desires" in a Marxian sense are reinforced. In a similar line of thought, Waring (2008) argues that professionals, even though seeking to escape the monotony of their workplace in the fitness gym, are still trapped in the logic of their work: in interviews, gym goers often indicate a sense of *obligation* and an inner force to work out on a regular basis. The researcher concludes that ritualized sport activities, calculated input-output relations, set goals and recorded achievements are over-determined by both the practice of paid work and a sense of moral duty. Far from being a neutral leisure space, Waring concludes, the fitness gym generates and sustains a certain type of social identity, namely the "healthy and profitable workforce" (Waring, 2008, p.307). Indeed, the different compartments in fitness gyms such as the cardio-vascular area and weight machines, as well as the single machines that are designed to train only one or two muscle groups, remind us strongly of Taylorist practices in the factory: seeking maximum effectiveness of human activity by breaking it down into little, manageable units (Crossley, 2006). Hence, one is inclined to agree with this argument, namely that in industrial and post-industrial societies where discipline

and hard work are regarded as moral, it is also socially valuable to cultivate bodily strength and appearance, and dissolute not to do so.

1.3 The path to perfection: the body as a project

A second, related issue in the literature is the idea of self-improvement, self-regulation and self-assessment (e.g. Gill et al. 2005; Markula, 2003; Markula & Pringle, 2006). It is noted that neoliberal understandings of health as a private matter increase people's willingness to engage in 'care of the self' practices which leads to an increase of what may be referred to as the 'body industry' (Straughan, 2010). Featherstone (1987) distinguishes between the inner and the outer body: the former refers to "the concern with the healthy and optimum functioning of the body which demands maintenance and repair in the face of disease" whilst the latter is "appearance as well as the movement and control of the body within social space" (Featherstone, 1987, p. 58). The author argues that: "Within consumer culture, the inner and outer body became conjoined: the prime purpose of the maintenance of the inner body becomes the enhancement of the appearance of the outer body" (Featherstone, 1987, p. 58). Baudrillard goes further and argues that the outer body has become more important to people. He states that:

> Health today is not so much a biological imperative linked to survival as a social imperative linked to status. It is not so much a basic 'value' as a form of prestige display. In the mystique of such display, fitness stands next to beauty. Their signs are exchanged within the framework of personalization, that anxious perfectionist manipulation of the sign function of the body. (Baudrillard 1998, p. 139)

It is argued that in order to increase profit the health and fitness industry is at pains to show how 'imperfect' bodies can be sculpted and corrected by the right diet, exercise and cosmetic products. Advertisements suggest that individuals are personally responsible for monitoring and controlling their bodies so that a slim and fit-looking physique does not only signify attractiveness but also self-control and ambition (e.g. Becker, 1993; Gimblin, 2002). Sassatelli writes that:

> In contemporary Western societies, the fit body has in many ways replaced body decoration as a potent symbol of status and character, both for men and

women…what is fashionable is the actual sculpting of the body itself. The fit body appears to reconcile both instrumental and ceremonial values, ready to be dressed up or shown, it displays vitality and control, power and utility. (Sassatelli, 2010, p.1)

Fitness training is thus considered a means by which transformation of and control over one's life is achieved. Through regular exercise in gyms, bodies become targets of self-surveillance and transformation. Indeed, gym membership usually starts with the diagnostic procedure of a health check where weight, height, body fat, blood pressure, body mass index etc. are measured and compared to what has been established as a scientific norm so that goals for further training can be identified. The experience of having control over one's body and the power to alter it seems to be a crucial working principle in the gym that will be interesting to unpack in the course of this research. According to Johansson (1996), for example, the gym distributes an "ideology of the dissatisfied", encouraging the idea that only through regular exercise, and the will to change and to normalize oneself, is it possible to achieve personal fulfillment: the gym, in this sense, is a path to perfection.

In the course of this research, I look not only at how the fit body functions as a cultural imaginary, displaying control and power, but I am also interested in how gym attendees themselves *experience* a sense of control and mastery through their gym training. In other words, I want to look at how the dominant ways of thinking about bodily fitness unfold in gym users' *subjective* experience.

Transforming the self through body-work

It has been noted that the discourse of self-improvement is deeply linked to ideas about self-discovery and the search for an authentic self (Heyes, 2007). Featherstone (2010) argues that in contemporary Western societies, the body, and here especially the face, is understood as a reflection of one's inner self; hence body modification technologies and body enhancement regimes can be understood as attempts to construct a beautiful appearance and thereby a beautiful self (Heyes, 2007, p.193). Rose's (2001) notion of "the somatic individual"

describes these technologies and regimes though which people seek not only to transform their flesh but first and foremost to transform their selves:

> Selfhood has become intrinsically somatic – ethical practices increasingly take the body as a key site for work on the self…we see an increasing stress on personal reconstruction through acting on the body in the name of a fitness that is simultaneously corporeal and psychological….the corporeal existence and vitality of the self have become the privileged site of experiments with subjectivity. (Rose, 2001, p. 18)

Rose further argues that body-work, taken as a project of the self, is actually the *accompanying condition* for what Foucault calls normalization. As Foucault notes:

> The power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties and to render differences useful by fitting them into one another. It is easy to understand how the power of the norm functions within a system of formal equality, since within a homogeneity that is the rule, the norm introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences. (p. 184) (…) The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the 'social-worker'-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behaviour, his aptitudes, his achievements. (Foucault, 1995, p. 304)

By providing a grid of comparability, norms have a clear moral impetus; they prescribe what counts as 'good' and desirable in a given area. Crucially, what counts as normal, acceptable and not deviant is not only expressed overtly but, perhaps more often than not, it is implicit in ways of thinking, feeling and acting. As Feder (2013) notes, normalizing practices become obvious when people talk about intelligence scores, body mass index etc., but they are "less conspicuous when they are unspoken, what we may even take to be natural or understand as our own" (Feder, 2013, p.62). In this present study, I will draw on the idea that

practices employed in gyms can be normalizing in their effects, however, I will also examine whether the gym *individualizes* too, as Foucault (1995) suggests.

1.4 Doing gender in the gym

For feminist scholars, the lived body, or as Grosz (1994) points out, lived *bodies* (male, female, black, brown, white, large, small etc.) are crucial for an understanding of subjectivities. Especially since the 1970s, feminist scholars take issue with the complexities of gender/body/sport relations (Birrell, 2002; Theberge, 2002). According to Birrell (2002), feminist literature on sport deals predominately with the following broad topics: the discursive construction of femininities through media and sport practices; the production and effects of male power; the substantiation of gender inequalities through sport; the sporting body as a site of struggle over gender power relations and gendered identities; resistant sporting practices of women (and men). In the following I shall only focus on the literature that deals with the role of gendered bodies in the context of the gym.

Drawing on the premise that femininities and masculinities are historically and culturally produced, the impact of gym-related performances upon gendered identities has been addressed by various scholars (e.g. Cahn, 1995; Craig & Liberti 2007; Dworkin 2003; Heyes, 2007; Johnston, 1996; Johansson, 1996; McCreary & Saucier, 2009; Salvatore & Marecek 2010; Tiggeman & Williamson, 2000). Dworkin (2003) writes that for most of its existence the gym has been associated with masculinity. The body building gym especially promoted and celebrated characteristics associated with male-ness, such as strength, power, competition and aggression, so that one could argue that through cultivating a muscular physical exterior, men were able to re-emphasize their superiority and dominance. Whilst this still may be true for bodybuilding gyms, contemporary fitness gyms seem to work in more complex ways. Women's participation in gyms has widely increased and women entering the weight room have become more common. Nonetheless empirical studies show that men and women tend to have very different objectives and motives for attending the gym (e.g. Haravon and Collins, 2002; Salvatore and Marecek 2010). Whilst male gym goers seem to be disproportionally concerned with arm, back and chest strength in comparison to lower body strength female participants are primarily interested in weight loss,

and thus engage more in cardio-vascular exercises. The aerobics room is still regarded as a typical feminine space whereas the weight room is a masculine place. As Maguire and Mansfield (1998) contend, aerobics is a way to achieve appropriate femininity via a toned, slender body. Aerobics classes "are a legitimate way for women to sculpt a petite, passive ideal and embody the myth that women's bodies are inferior to men" so that both the practice and the space in which aerobics occurs can be said to be ideologically bounded (Maguire & Mansfield, 1998, p. 128). And indeed, the image of the thin, white, 'attractive', glamorous, heterosexual, young woman certainly permeates the cultural landscape of Western industrialized societies (Tiggemann, Gardiner & Slater, 2000).

In a more recent longitudinal case study Nash (2012) focussed on pregnant women who regularly participated in *FitForTwo* aerobic classes at an Australian health club. Nash observes that, as in periods of non-pregnancy, pregnant women were expected to manage and discipline their bodies in accordance with dominant gender norms which, quite paradoxically, were also dominated by anxieties about weight gain. For gym users this involved not only training for birth but also fighting 'surplus' fat and gaining control over their pregnant bodies. Nash also provides an interesting discussion about how pregnant gym users, perhaps more than non-pregnant women, compared the size and shape of their bellies to those of other pregnant women in aerobics classes. As she writes, the fact that body related anxieties manifest themselves in the embodied experience of group exercise challenges research suggesting that prenatal exercise has largely positive effects on mood and body image. For some of her informants, Nash maintains, pregnancy fitness meant a third shift of work on top of their continuing commitment at home and in paid employment. Hence, rather than being a leisure activity, pregnancy exercise sometimes took on the characteristics of work as women regarded it almost as compulsory, also long after giving birth.

Brown and Graham (2008), who studied gay and straight Australian men's self report measures of body satisfaction to investigate whether there is a relationship between sexual orientation and motifs for exercising, claim that gay males, compared to heterosexual males, are less satisfied with their bodies. According to the authors, homosexual men who score higher on a so-called 'femininity-scale'

show greater discontent with parts and functions of their bodies associated with muscularity. No doubt, the authors' binary conceptualization and quantification of so-called 'masculinity- and femininity-scores' can be criticized for various reasons, mostly for being essentialist and heteronormative: femininity scores are measured through personality characteristics that deal with group harmony and interdependence, such as being affectionate, understanding, compassionate and loyal, whilst masculinity scores consists of items indicating leadership qualities and independence, such as self-reliance, being analytical, ambitious and forceful. The results of this study indicate that body satisfaction goes hand in hand with a higher sense of what the authors describe as a 'masculine self'. However, one could also interpret the results differently and ask whether practices at the gym do not promote self-reliance, analytical thinking and ambition through various discursive strategies and material practices in the first place? In other words, rather than assuming that body-satisfied gym participants display personality traits associated with masculinity one could suspect that gym practices *sui generis* generate and reinforce the desirability of an self-reliant and potent body and self.

It has been widely acknowledged that modern-day gym activities correlate with other regimes of self-altering practices, such as the acquisition of beauty products, cosmetic surgery, eating behavior (such as diets) or fashions that reinforce certain discourses on gender (e.g. Bartky, 1990; Lloyd, 2006). Constructed body ideals in magazines, films or books remind women how the aesthetic body is supposed to look: athletic but thin, strong but vulnerable, muscular but curvy. Yet, these corporeal ideals are mediated through a patriarchal gaze that disempowers not only the female body but the female subject *in toto* by attributing a subordinate position to her (Berger, 1972; Duncan, 1994; Duncan et al., 1998).

The fitness and beauty industry promotes a direct link between outer appearance and maintenance of individuality and character, perhaps more for women than for men. Women who fail to position themselves within the dominant aesthetic norms, as Bartky (1990) argues, are regarded as fallen and morally reproachable. This is where she sees strong parallels between the moralizing mission of the Church and the normalizing function of the fashion-beauty complex, both inflicting a sense of shame and inferiority in relation to the body. Following

Bartky, one could argue that the modern-gym promises salvation and relief. However, one must also ask whether the gym fulfills this promise or whether part of the reason the gym 'works' is that the search for the perfect body remains unfinished.

The construction of female subjectivities at the gym

When thinking about gender in the context of the gym it is fruitful to look at the history of this establishment more closely. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, gyms had firmly established themselves as a white, middle-class leisure pursuit by the 1980s. One factor of their success was certainly the inclusion of female consumers: with more white, middle-class women in the labour force, their ability to consume goods and products for their *own* use (rather than for their homes or families) grew (Andrews & Talbot, 2000). Not surprisingly, women's increasing buying power and independence paved the way for messages of empowerment and individualism eagerly adopted by the advertising industry, with imperatives such as "reward yourself, you deserve it" (Douglas, 2000, p. 268). As fitness activities take time and money, a gym membership can be said to be a marker of independence and success:

> The ability to spend time and money on one's appearance was a sign of personal success and breaking away from the old roles and rules that had held women down in the past […] The ability to indulge oneself, to pamper oneself, and focus at length on oneself without having to listen to the needy voices of others was the mark of upscale female achievement. (Douglas, 2000, p. 268)

I would suggest that what Douglas contends here about the function of fitness gyms of the second half of the 20th century can still be applied to the early 21th century. One might ask to what extent the gym is not just a marker of lifestyle but also a marker of personality, especially in terms of gender.

Spielvogel's (2000, 2003) research on women in gyms addresses this very question. In her ethnographic fieldwork in Japan Spielvogel studied women's gym habits and showed the ways in which cultural and social representations of the female body inform the lifestyle choices of women in coercive ways. Having carried out her research in two popular fitness clubs in her role as an aerobics

instructor, the author argues that the cultural construction of Japanese female identity as hard-working, disciplined, youthful, healthy, patient, responsible, maternal, gentle and self-sacrificing is strongly reinforced in the gym environment. Similarly, Craig and Liberti (2007) state that women-only gyms are designed to create a non-competitive, non-judgmental environment to foster 'feminine' identities through their organizational culture, that is their interactional styles (conversations about marriage, childcare etc.), feminized decoration (pink, toys, infantile pictures) and promoted goals (weight reduction).

That competition is played out regardless of this being a 'feminine' space has been shown by Maguire and Mansfield (1998) who observed that in exercise-to-music classes the space in the front of the mirrors tended to be "reserved" for the best in the class. They note that the most fit – read, slender and skillful – female exercisers in the class would come early and mark their spots with towels, equipment, or gym bags, right in front of the fitness instructor and women who felt they were not as 'good' moved themselves to the back.

> A distinct type of rivalry exists between women in the exercise figuration in their quest for optimal performance and the achievement of better bodies. They compete against their 'opponents' without using force but clearly gauge their levels of fitness and expertise against other performers. (Maguire & Mansfield, 1998, p. 122)

How a particular fitness activity can be a forceful factor in shaping male identities is shown in Andrews et al.'s study (2005) of bodybuilding. Here it is argued that to be a member of the gym and to get involved in bodybuilding practices requires much more than a monthly membership fee: body builders are expected to have a specific body size, strong commitment to their hobby and exhibit a good performance as well as a great deal of expertise. According to their physical attributes, Andrews et al. (2005) argue, men are positioned in a hierarchical social order by which they can gain a sense of belonging to and identification with a group of peers. Interestingly, this social order seems to be echoed in the distribution of space and time within the gym that the authors have studied, a place that is both divided spatially into different types of clients or machines and

temporally by being a conventional gym in the morning and afternoon and transforming into a hardcore bodybuilding place in the evening.

1.5 'Race' and the sporting body

In the course of my literature review, I could not identify any scholarly work that explicitly addresses the racialised body in the fitness gym. However, there is a vast body of literature that critically engages with the ways in which ethnicities and skin colour, or 'race'[6], are discursively associated with athletic performance in more general terms (e.g. Essed & Goldberg, 2002, Omi & Winant, 2014). As Hylton (2009) writes:

> There is a common perception in sport that our genes and to a degree our cultural background dictate the prowess of an individual sportsman or woman. This discourse of advantage and of course disadvantage in sport is invariably reduced to 'harmless' racial differences, a reduction that suggests, however, a more sinister undercurrent: race logic. (Hylton, 2009, p. 1)

Critical race theorists argue against a particular trend in the sports literature that seeks to establish a link between athletic ability and race, implying that black athletes have 'the better genes' and therefore are, phenotypically speaking, better suited for some sports such as sprinting and jumping. As St Louis (2003) writes: "The suggestion [of such accounts] is that physical specificities of body size and proportion, namely skeletal structure and musculature…form the basis for black athletic advantage" (St Louis, 2003, p.79). As the author further asserts, these assumptions are reminiscent of 19th-century racial science, "that contrast the primal physicality and sensuality of black bodies, and their infantile minds, with the cultured sociability of white Europeans" (St Louis, 2003, p. 85). Although there is no systematic study of how racialised bodies experience themselves at the gym, one can assume that the dominant discourses on physical 'black superiority' (often entangled with discourses on black male-ness and black femininities) affect gym users' sense of self in certain ways.

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[6] Certainly, 'race' is a social construction, however, "the act and effects of this construction (racialisation) have produced actual division between people" (Armstrong and Ng, 2005, p. 35) and one can add, actual inequalities, oppression, exploitation, and psychic injuries.

1.6 Conclusion

Most of the sociological literature outlined above considers contemporary fitness practices to be over-determined by the logics of production and consumption as well as late-modern, or neoliberal, practices of self-management. Late-modernity is here understood as as a continuation of, and not a complete rupture with, modernity, in the sense most prominently discussed by sociologists such as Beck, Giddens and Lash (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Beck, Giddens & Lash, 1994). Another way of conceptualising this period is provided by Bauman (2000) who describes a transition from "solid" to "liquid modernity", the latter defined as

> a condition in which social forms (structures that limit individual choices, institutions that guard repetitions of routines, patterns of acceptable behaviour) can no longer (and are not expected) to keep their shape for long, because they decompose and melt faster than the time it takes to cast them, and once they are cast for them to set (Bauman, 2007, p. 1).

The body is one of the last 'objects' that people can hold to, that they can control and manage without feeling as powerless as they otherwise do. These are certainly adequate observations as one could not deny that the relationship to one's body bears strongly resembles with other practices within the late-capitalist, or neoliberal society. Categories such as gender, class and, one can add, age, ethnicity and ability, are also highly relevant for an understanding of how contemporary gyms work. However, these approaches bear the danger of being moralizing in their tone (i.e. condemning gym exercise as a conformist practice) and they are also often totalizing in their argumentation by claiming that the gym is mirroring and reinforcing societal structures, and therefore is merely a consequence of the same. The fitness gym is treated as just another locale that produces the 'consumerist subject' or reinforces gender dichotomies. Such a view either qualifies the study of the fitness gym as a social and cultural phenomena as almost redundant, or it delimits the analysis by establishing an outside source, a point of reference through which the gym can be explained.

What I would like to propose in this research is that one can understand how discourses unfold in the subjective experience of gym members through the study of the material, spatial and interactional 'coordinates' and dynamics of the gym. More specifically, I want to address the following research questions:

(1) What discourses - understood as certain ways of knowing, experiencing and relating to the body and the self - are generated in and through the spatial, material and social practices of the gym?

(2) How do these socio-spatially and materially anchored discourses unfold within the subjective experience of gym attendees? How does discourse imbue subjectivities and yield affective responses?

Towards a psychosocially informed discourse analysis

My research seeks to go beyond a conventional discourse analytic framework (see Chapter 2). I draw on a psychosocial approach, asking how subjectivities unfold in and through the social and material domain of the gym.[7] Such an approach, as Roseneil (2006) writes, "seeks to transcend the dualism of the individual and the social, and takes seriously the realm of the intra-psychic" (p. 848). In this sense, there is not an 'inside' *and* an 'outside', a subjective *and* an objective sphere. The subjective, the experiential, the affective are always thought together with the social and the material registers. Subjects are 'invested' in discourses in a sense that their "desires and anxieties, probably not conscious or intentional…motivate the specific positions they take up and the selection of accounts through which they portray themselves" (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p.15).

A psychosocial approach is genuinely transdisciplinary, taking theoretical insights and methodological tools from what is conventionally called 'social sciences' or 'humanities' (such as psychology, sociology, history, human geography etc.) together with insights from a series of other areas such as feminist, gender, post-colonial and psychoanalytic studies (Roseneil & Frosh, 2012). As Frosh explicates, in a psychosocial studies framework the subject is understood both as

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[7] It should be noted that there is no one single psychosocial studies approach. On the contrary, the field of psychosocial research is saturated by vivid debates on which theories are best suited to grasp the psyche/social couplet (see e.g. Frosh & Baraitser, 2008).

an agent in the social world and "subject *of* (or subjected *to*) forces from elsewhere" (Frosh, 2003, p. 1551, original emphases). These "forces from elsewhere" can be understood not only as identity-categories such as gender, 'race', class but on a more micro-level, too.[8] To give an example, gym participants are active agents in a sense that they tend to act upon and relate to their bodies in certain ways and not in others. At the same time, the gym *qua* socio-spatial environment itself suggests certain ways of acting upon and relating to the body whilst omitting others. Gym members are, then, both 'subjected' to the material environment and the discourses generated herein and, at the same time, they are in constant affective, cognitive, practical engagement with those discourses. They may take on these discourses, that is to say, they may be 'invested' in them but they may also negotiate or resist them.

Participants' practice at the gym will constantly inform the ways in which they understand, experience and feel about themselves. This is what I refer to when I state that the gym produces 'subject-effects'. Indeed, the analytic move from discourse to subjectivities is one of the core theoretical and methodological preoccupations of psychosocial studies (Roseneil & Frosh, 2012). Such a psychosocial approach to the study of gyms will require a conceptualization of 'discourse' that goes beyond the textual and the representational and - as a consequence – it will require a theoretical and methodological extension of much Foucault-inspired work. In the chapters to come, I will show that through the study of spatially situated practices, interactions and performances, we may advance our understanding of how the gym works as a productive place in which health, the body, and other aspects of the self are generated. For the study of the gym's socio-spatiality it will be necessary both to observe the setting, the equipment and body-work accomplished there and also to practically engage with the environment. It should briefly be noted that to study the gym from within is not the same as saying that the gym is detached from the outside world or should be studied isolated from it. On the contrary, what I would like to argue is that without an in-depth understanding of the gym from within and without knowing how users think, act and feel therein it is not possible to relate it to other, broader

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[8] The dynamic unconscious is also considered as such a force. Albeit interesting and certainly fruitful, I am not concerned with psychoanalytic theories in this project.

societal dynamics. At the heart of psychosocial research is also an analytic sensibility to experiences, feelings, and values that oppose or do not easily fit in to normative or dominant discourse (Roseneil, 2012). Hence, in this study I will also be attentive to (self-) critical accounts of gym users and ask how these participants negotiate and give meaning to their gym practice.

The next two chapters present the theoretical framework I adopt in this study. Whilst Chapter 2 works towards a conceptualization of discourse that prioritizes the material over the textual, Chapter 3 foregrounds the role of socio-spatial practices and subjective experiences herein. More precisely, I will suggest that particularly Foucault's and Goffman's ideas on space and the interactional order can assist us in addressing the research questions posed above, but I will also argue that their ideas must be extended to capture the experiential dimensions of gym participation, including affects and relations between people.

2

The subjectifying power of discourse

In this chapter, I suggest that the scope of conventional, language-based discourse analysis needs to be supplemented by a psychosocial framework if we want to understand the gym's subject-effects. This chapter is divided into two parts: In the first part I discuss to what extent the present study may and may not benefit from two versions of discourse analysis that are widely employed in the social science literature, namely Discursive Psychology and Critical Discourse Analysis. I suggest that these approaches tend to prioritize the textual over the material registers of discourse and thus fail to capture interactions, embodied practices and the affective and relational dynamics herein. In the second part of this chapter, I show how a Foucault-inspired discourse analysis may be compatible with such a much-needed psychosocial perspective but how it also needs to be extended in various ways. I argue that further theoretical and methodological sophistication is needed to fully grasp the 'subjective imprints' of gym discourse, and here particularly the affective and relational dimension of the gym experience.

2.1 The different approaches to discourse

There are a variety of ways in which the term 'discourse' is used in the social sciences. Indeed, as Potter and Wetherell remark, "it is perfectly possible [in the social sciences] to have two books [on discourse] with no overlap in content at all (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p.6). This is mainly because the notion of 'discourse' can change according to discipline, and according to the research goals of the project it serves (Mills, 2004). The term 'discourse' therefore has a multiplicity of meanings and can be said to lack of a unified conceptualization, and consequently, a unified methodology (Edley in Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001). Parker (2015) identifies eight forms of discourse analysis that differ in the level of analysis, ranging from small-scale, micro-interpersonal forms of inquiry to large-scale, historical-political levels of analysis. In this work, I will mainly engage with the Foucauldian conceptualization of discourse as 'ways of speaking' and 'ways of knowing'. Here, I am particularly interested in the how discourses enable subjects to interpret and act in and upon the social world in certain ways (Jäger, 2001).

In social sciences, one can particularly note two positions with theorists on one side of the spectrum highly influenced by Marxist notions and hence with explicit political agendas (Fairclough, 2001a, 2001b, 2005; van Dijk, 1993, 1995; Kress, 1989; Parker, 1989, 1992, 2005; Burman & Parker, 1993), and theorists with a focus on the discursive construction of identities, objects and subject positions in conversations or interviews (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, 1992). I will outline these two approaches, and explain how my take on discourse may benefit from them, but also how my approach differs from them.

Discursive Psychology

Mainstream psychology's concern has been for attitudes, beliefs and representations understood to be within the personal, or individual (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995). The premise is often that there is a coherent, bounded, essential 'self' that can be studied scientifically (e.g. through experiments, observational studies, questionnaires, surveys). Where the category of the 'social' is being employed and not bracketed off, it tends to be reduced to primary identity categories such as 'race', 'sex', gender, class from which attitudes, beliefs etc. are said to emanate. As Frosh (2003) points out, the 'social' is being essentialized in such accounts. A psychosocial approach, as noted in the previous chapter, adopts a critical stance towards this type of theorization and rejects the conventionalized dichotomy between the individual and the social. The individual is not regarded as the privileged object of knowledge, "it is rather a site, in which there are criss-crossing lines of force, and out of which that precious feature of human existence, subjectivity, emerges" (Frosh, 2003, p. 1149).

Although more limited in its scope, Discursive Psychology (DP henceforth) shares some these criticisms and tries to establish itself as a counter-movement to mainstream academic psychology, too. Much influenced by conversational analysis and ethnomethodology, DP aims to study language, and particularly people's everyday conversation, to study the discursive construction of identities: the "turn-by-turn sequencing and organisation of talk" (Benwall & Stokoe, 2006, p.65). As Potter and Wiggins state, DP "is focussed on discourse because it is the primary arena for action, understanding and intersubjectivity" (Wiggins & Potter cited in Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008, p.73). The term 'discourse' in this

approach is understood to be equivalent to verbal communication, talk, speech or conversation: The analyst, we are given to understand, looks at naturally occurring spoken language. Discourse is thus treated as a linguistic communication between at least two people engaging with each other, or, as Hawthorn puts it, it is an "interpersonal activity" (Hawthorn cited in Mills, 2004, p.3). Interpretative repertoires, a term developed by Potter and Wetherell, "are clusters of terms organized around a central metaphor, often used with grammatical regularity." (Wetherell & Potter cited in Antaki, 1988, p.74). These play a great role in DP. Their study reveals how particular objects and subjects are constructed through types of talk or "a register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterize and evaluate actions and events" (Wetherell & Potter cited in Antaki, 1988, p.74). Heritage (2005), as one of the eminent conversational analysts DP draws on, argues that knowledge about the world and one's identity are "locally produced, incrementally developed, and by extension, [as] transformable at any moment" (Heritage, 2005, p. 111).

Although scholars like Wetherell (1998) criticize this 'micro-sociological' approach to talk and suggest that meticulous attention to conversation must be supplemented by something broader and macro-structural - that is, socio-political contexts, social and cultural beliefs or values - the empirical works produced remain mostly limited to micro-scale perspectives. It seems that the oscillation between the textual and the extra- and inter-textual is difficult to manage if one limits the data to conversations and interviews alone. Thus, whilst DP allows us to study how certain identity categories emerge *in situ*, between two more people as they interact with and relate to each other, it fails to account for how certain ways of talking and relating are made possible in the first place – an issue that Foucauldian approaches would seek to tackle.

As Young (1981) puts it, it is not so much the content of a text or talk that is of primary interest but "the discursive rules that were *a priori*, assumed as a constituent part of discourse and therefore of knowledge" (Young, 1981, p. 48). In this sense, DP does not account so much for what it is that makes identified repertoires possible in the first place. As Hook states in his critique of DP:

…what counts as knowledge, and the various systems through which knowledge is qualified/disqualified …are not traced back far enough to the *material conditions of possibility*…As a result, discourse is not sufficiently grasped in its relations to power …and discourse analysis becomes more a project of reading the text than of engaging a discourse. (Hook, 2007, pp.525-26, emphasis in original)

The gym's internal rules, practices, logics and material functionings make certain truth-claims possible and ways of being, acting, thinking and experiencing, too. I hope it will become clear at the end of this chapter why gym members' conversation, while no doubt important, would not suffice for a discursive analytics and why we need grids of analysis that are sensitive to non-linguistic accounts. The next account of discourse analysis goes beyond a micro-study of interaction and talk, however it goes into a different direction than the one I have in mind here: it aims at a more macro-level and seeks to capture the political, historical and ideological underpinnings of any given discourse.

Critical Discourse Analysis

What is known today as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA henceforth), according to Bell and Garret (1998), "is best viewed as a shared perspective encompassing a range of approaches rather than as just one school" (Bell Garret, 1998, p. 7). Among the scholars whose works have profoundly contributed to the development of CDA are van Dijk in critical media studies (1993, 1995), Wodak in sociolinguistics (1998), Fairclough in cultural studies (1989, 1992, 1995, 2001a, 2001b, 2005) and Parker in social psychology (1989, 1992, 2005).

CDA, according to Fairclough:

aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony. (Fairclough, 1995, p. 135)

It is clear from the outset that CDA has a clear political agenda: the term critical refers first to an ideological level that seeks to identify power relations and hegemonic practices set through discourse; second, it refers to a rhetorical level seeking to uncover the ways in which discourse makes itself persuasive; third, the term refers to a strategic level that asks for the intention and function of the discourse (Fairclough, 2005). Inevitably, the discourse analyst holds an explicit socio-political position and adopts a 'suspicious' attitude towards the object of study that encourages her to go beyond what is said and written (Van Dijk, 1993). In other words, CDA is less concerned with individuals' talk, and more with political and institutional practices: or, as Fairclough (1995) puts it, with text and *context*.

In contrast to DP, one can note that CDA has a broader and more contextualized approach to discourse. Here, texts are treated as social events because linguistic structures are believed to be connected to and even to be over-determined by social structures. Fairclough (2003) touches upon what I would like to stress in this study when he defines the 'orders of discourse' as "a network of practices in its language aspect…genres and styles" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 24). The notion of styles, here defined as "the bodily behaviour in constituting particular ways of being," (Fairclough, 2003, p. 26) appears to be a promising element. Applied to the gym context, one could think of I bodily stylizations and performances on the gym floor such as people's postures, gestures, gazes, noises, clothing, ways of holding the drink bottle and behaviours in the locker room. Fairclough, however, falls back into the linguistic domain as he continues: "An example would be the style of a particular type of manager: his or her way of using language as a resource for self-identifying" (Fairclough, 2003, p.26). The author therefore equates what he first calls "bodily behaviour" ultimately with the individual's use of language, and seems to have in mind the idea of the enunciative modalities of language. Overall, as Mills (2004) states, the work in the field of CDA tends to be preoccupied with the ways in which spoken and written language constitutes subjects and hence stays in the realm of language. Whilst no doubt, language is a form of acting upon and shaping the world, an analysis of discourse would benefit from elements that are not obviously or exclusively textual/semiotic; elements that give weight and force to a (here managerial) discourse: the way the manager

dresses, smells, styles his/her hair, acts in meetings etc. One can conclude that most forms of discourse analysis have confined themselves to grasping how discourse operates through a 'reading' of textual and iconographic material. To reiterate, although written and spoken language is an important element, it represents only one approach to the wide-ranging ways in which discourse takes hold. Discourse is not simply 'done' through talk or text but through the ways subjects, as embodied subjects, appropriate discourses in everyday lives. My focus in this piece of work is on how discourse is subjectivized and the role of material practices, space, affects[1] and ways of relating to others.

A second, and related problem posed by the approaches presented above is that virtually all the authors of these approaches suggest distinct stepwise procedures and methodological guidelines that reflect their own theoretical commitments and personal research concerns (for an overview see Parker, 2015). Such attempts to pinpoint discourse can only be appropriated for one's own project if one agrees with the author's use of the term and if the research topic, questions and the collected data are compatible with the methodological recommendations (Joergensen & Phillips, 2002). A strict mapping of methodological specifications is also problematic in this present project, which tries to move away from a study of the uses of language. Rather than simply replicating one of the suggested guidelines, the present project aims at constructing a particular way of analysing data that speaks directly to its own particular psychosocially informed concerns. Accounting for the material and spatial coordinates of discourse and studying its subject-effects in terms of people's experiences and affects is a major challenge

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[1] In this work, I adopt Masumi's (1996) qualification of the terms 'affect' and 'emotion'. Masumi understands affects as close to bodily experiences, almost as visceral responses, and emotions as already mediated and channelled through narrative, thus conveying meaning and functionality. As Hook (2011) puts it: "Emotion thus represents an assimilation, a closure and containment of affect within symbolic means" (Hook, 2011, p.111). Such a qualification somehow suggests that affects are outside discourse, or 'extra-discursive'. However, although affective responses close to the body may not always be contingent with prevailing discourses, and thus 'external' to them, one can still argue that they are always framed and conditioned by those to some extent. In Hook's words: "We must not make the mistake of isolating the question of the bodily (or seemingly, *affective*) phenomenology from the co-ordinates of its socio-symbolic and historical location" (Hook, 2012, p.47, emphasis in original). To provide an example in the context of the gym, the way a participant may experience and respond to his or her body image in the mirror (e.g. with repulsion, shame or pride) is certainly framed by the normalizing discourses on the health and fit body to some extent.

for the present study and can, at the same time, be a significant opportunity to contribute to the field of discourse analysis.

2.2 Beyond text: the role of material practices in discourse theory

Parker et al. qualify discourse as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" and add that

> …these 'practices' include patterns of meaning that may be visual or spatial, that may comprise face-to-face interaction or the organization of national boundaries. The 'objects' that such practices create … will include all the things that we see, refer to and take for granted as actually existing 'out there'. (Parker et al., 1999, p.6)

The authors advance the scope of what is usually meant by practices and include spatiality and visuality, physical settings and architecture, social encounters and conduct:

> We 'move around' all kinds of text, metaphorically speaking, finding ways into the systems of meaning that comprise them so that they make sense and vantage points from which we can summarise themes and start to identify contradictions. In the case of the physical texts … we really can move around them and we must inhabit them, we must live them to be able to read them. (Parker et al., 1999, p.8)

Although Parker et al. use the term 'text' as a metaphor, one needs to be cautious of this term's use as it bears the danger of falling back into a form of linguistically bound contextualization of discourse. The same danger lies underneath the claim that discourses are a set of *statements* that circulate in society at certain historical moments and produce what is considered as valid and true. Parker et al.'s conceptualization of Foucauldian discourse resonates well with Hall's take on discourse as

> …a group of statements which provide a language for talking about - a way of representing the knowledge about - a particular topic at a particular historical moment… [discourse] is about language *and* practice ... It attempts to overcome the traditional distinction about what one says (language) and what one does (practice). (Hall, 1997, p. 291, emphasis in original)

It is through what people *do* that certain discourses leave the representational sphere of language and become actualized, come into being as the materialized social world. Crucially, discourses are not, as the notion of 'statements' would suggest, equivalent to enunciations, that, for example, Fairclough has in mind when he writes about managerial speech. Discourses do not translate pre-existing objects into medical, scientific or lay language. They produce objects by establishing a way of talking and thinking about them and by acting in certain ways. I would like to elaborate on what I mean by 'produce' here.

On the most basic level, discourses are *productive* in a sense that they engender social meaning. This may sound counter-intuitive at first glance, for discourses often operate though exclusion, that is, through taboos, prohibitions, omissions and rejections. However, exclusionary mechanisms may as well produce social 'truths': by creating the terrain that makes certain things and ways of being unsayable, undoable and impossible, they also render other things, doable and possible (Foucault, 1972). One can say that discourse analysis - underpinned by a social constructionist epistemology – is capable of addressing how social meaning is being constructed. Consequently, one is inclined to take a critical stance towards seemingly self-evident knowledge and to identify how taken-for-granted statements are linked to specific ways of 'reading' that render those statements as truthful and meaningful in the first place.

What is of interest for discourse analysts is less, then, what is being known but more what the conditions of possibility of that knowing might be. The conventional social constructionist stance is that truth and knowledge are relative, dependent on context and open to many meanings. However, the important point for Foucault is that knowledge and meaning are not utterly relative but in fact dependent on productive material and discursive arrangements. Historical-political specificity and contingency is what renders truth often stable and authoritative in a given context (Foucault, 1981). It is useful to provide an example here: at the gym fitness trainers are often regarded as authorities of knowledge, as experts and hence their assertions about the body, nutrition, exercise etc. are likely to be taken for 'true'. But perhaps more importantly, these truth-claims are produced through the practices the gym promotes or the ways in

which the equipment operates. These practices involve subjects in at least two ways: first, practices must be accomplished by *someone*; without subjects discourses would remain in a 'social vacuum', unrealized. Second, discourses also produce 'subject-effects', that is to say, they leave their 'imprints' on and shape subjectivities; discourses are subjectivized by people, they colour people's experiences, produce desires and affects, establish certain ways of relating and are negotiated and contested. Discourses saturate subjects' ways of understanding the world and themselves herein, they determine "what is attended to do, what is desirable to be done, how people and objects are to be understood, related to and acted upon" (Yates & Hiles, 2010, p. 56).

In the context of this study, one may then ask which body-related desires are articulated at the gym, how gym users understand and relate to their bodies or which affects they tend to have during training. To address these issues, the analysis of talk, reports, manifestos, narratives and policies, can only be one side of the coin whilst the study of embodied practices, affects and ways of relating to others will be equally important. This resonates well with the argument made by Hook (2007) that although discourse analysts never denied the existence of more material and interactional forces they are nevertheless guilty of privileging linguistic dimensions of discourse, of neglecting the "spatial and physical sets of practice" (Hook, 2007, p.57). Before I explain why historicity is central to a Foucauldian methodology in general, and yet not the focus of this particular study, it is necessary to qualify how the term 'material' is understood in the context of the present study first. Affects and ways of relating, two issues that I frequently refer to in the sections above as I consider them to be vital to a psychosocially informed discourse analysis, will be dealt with in Chapter 3.

The productive force of discourse
Generally speaking, materiality comprises the field of the tangible and the observable, the physical and the concrete. For the purposes of this study I consider the material as embracing a) tangible artefacts (e.g. gym equipment, clothing), b) observable embodied practices and performances, and c) interactions herein. This qualification of the material may seem trivial but it bears the important implication that an analytics that is keen to study the material powers of discourse

requires different levels of analysis. Important to bear in mind, on all levels, the gym participants' embodied experiences and affects plays a crucial part although they are not observable or tangible but to be accessed and mediated through language. The 'material', as I have conceptualized it here, is not solely an effect of discourse. It is, however, the means by which discourse is realized and substantiated, by which it gains practical relevance. Put differently, discourse facilitates and rationalizes certain material arrangements (e.g. the positioning of mirrors at the gym) and at the same time material arrangements enables certain discourses to emerge and to shape and unfold in subjectivities.

So far, I have made rather tentative references to Foucault and his conceptualization of discourse. In the next section I want to elaborate on discourse theory from a Foucauldian angle and mostly refer to his work *The Archaeology of Knowledge* published in 1972. What makes this conceptualization of discourse interesting for this research is, as I will show below, its material anchoring, its groundings in space, and its orientation towards bodies and practices which yield a fruitful theoretical background for my own research purposes.

Systematics and context-dependency

One of the most productive ways of thinking about discourses is to understand them as the governing structures of what can be known and spoken about. As Mills writes, "a discursive structure can be detected because of the systematicity of the ideas, opinions, concepts, ways of thinking and behaving which are formed within a particular context." (Mills, 2004, p.15) Two ideas must be underlined here: discourses display a certain *systematics* and they occur in particular *contexts*. One of the key premises of discourse theory is, then, that a corpus of knowledge, a regime of truth, conveys an underlining systematics. However, in contrast to structuralist thinkers, Foucault (1972) wishes to emphasize "discontinuity, rupture, threshold, limit, series, and transformation" (Foucault, 1972, p. 12). Yet, there are regularities and unifying elements in the ways in which discourses are constructed. Hence the task of any discourse analysis is to discover the rules according to which objects, concepts, practices are constructed. This is why Foucault describes discourse not just as 'truth' but regimes of truth, alluding to the very mechanisms that produce and structure the same. Yet because

knowledge is contextually bound, different 'regimes' can exist next to each other or can undergo significant changes in place and time. They can be subject to various schisms so that what counts as credible and true within particular socio-historical boundaries can be considered as false and inappropriate somewhere else. In short, "the choice of truth" is constantly "repeated, renewed and displaced" (Foucault, 1981, p.70). This is what is meant by the context-dependency of discourse. Local and historical instability, internal variety or even contradiction, mutual exclusions and gaps are seemingly inherent to all discourses. In discourse analysis, one tends to expect, and indeed looks for heterogeneity, inconsistency and alterability rather than a cohesive narrative in which all parts neatly fit together (Foucault, 1972). Detecting this multiplicity, this entanglement, of meanings is essential to the analysis of discourse.

Discursive practices

To understand discourse in its full sense, that is, to account for the materiality of discourse, it helps to draw attention to the notion of discursive practices that best captures, perhaps, their two-fold nature. Foucault asserts that, "there is no knowledge without a particular discursive practice and any discursive practice may be defined by the knowledge that it forms" (Foucault, 1972, p.183). Discursive practices are different from formal, consciously and systematically produced systems of knowledge insofar as they are dispersed over different levels which Foucault calls *objects*, *concepts*, *enunciative modalities* and *strategies* (Foucault, 1972). One example of the applicability of the notion of the level of *objects* to the concerns of my research project would be to think of the 'fit body' as an object that is constructed in the field of medical science. This constructed object undergoes conceptual shifts in meaning and application, depending on time and space. Indeed, with *concepts*, theories or themes, Foucault (1972) refers to the fact that discursive practices lack the permanence and coherence displayed by formal knowledge systems. The analysis of *enunciative* modalities refers to the subject-positions from where discourses are produced and circulated. The gym user, for example, speaks and acts from a quite different position to that of the trainer, that is, the 'person supposed to know'. The level of *strategies* illuminates how discourses are often complex and dispersed, sometimes contradictory and even internally incompatible.

One could ask, how is it that one can analyse discourse in the first place if there is no coherence, fixed meaning or linear pattern? The content of women's fitness magazines underlines this point very clearly: on the one hand one finds articles that suggest adopting a slower lifestyle with solitary walks in the fresh air, spending more time in parks or gardens, meditation, and ultimately self-acceptance. A few pages on however, one finds advertisements of plastic surgery, successful time-management, exercises for the office etc. Foucault argues that although discursive practices are discontinuous and incoherent, there are nonetheless identifiable regularities, governing structures within this irregularity, which shed light on discursive relations. Coming back to the interrelationship between discourses and practices, another crucial feature needs to be mentioned. Practices, needless to say, depend on actors. Knowledge "…'lives' and 'acts' in the actions of people and in the objects they produce based on knowledge" (Jäger, 2001, p. 41). This underlines the claim that discourses are not reducible to mentalities, cognitive schemas, but possess material actuality and are anchored in people's experiences. Foucault further makes clear that "institutions, political events, economic practices and processes" need to be taken into account, too. As he notes:

> …there is nothing to be gained from describing this autonomous layer of discourses unless one can relate it to other layers, practices, institutions, social relations, political relations, and so on. It is that relationship which has always intrigued me. (Foucault, 1972, p.162)

As Foucault's own accounts can be historically located in a series of events, one can assume that he has accomplished a similar move for discourse as Althusser's (1970) 'material turn' to ideology. Analogous to Althusser's concern with the constitution of subjects through actual practices, Foucault opens the path for looking at the constitution of knowledge, and one may add, *self*-knowledge through discursive practices. As stated previously, if discourses change, objects do change their meanings, too. They lose their previous identities and become different objects (Jäger, 2001). Driving this argument to its extreme, not only do objects of knowledge alter with changing discourses but the perception of the self, and furthermore, individuals' experiences, and their affects can all be subject to change. In the context of my own study, I do not regard the gym simply as the

fitness industry's solution to a given societal problem (e.g. obesity, poor health). Instead I regard the establishment itself as a producer of new forms of *problematization* and intervention regarding the body and the self.

Historicity

The modern gym can be described as an institutional 'container' in which the body can be known and worked upon in certain ways. The body's properties can be sculptured, its mass can be formed, and its contours altered. The gym promotes the belief that the body is a living, flexible unit that one must act upon in various ways and on different levels (reducing/increasing, tighten/soften etc.). In other words, the gym today generates a particular engagement with the body that may be quite different from body-work some decades ago. An object of discourse is historically

> …constituted by all that was said in all the statements that named it, divided it up, described it, explained it, traced its developments, indicated its carious correlations, judged it, and possibly gave speech by articulating, in its name, discourses that were to be taken as its own. (Foucault, 1972, p.32)[2]

The same can be said about statements on health and fitness formulated in government publications, scientific articles, fitness magazines, exercise manuals, or in everyday life conversation about how to be fit, stay healthy etc. The 'fit subject' does not have a referent that precedes the notion. By the same token, what is said about fitness and what is done to be fit and healthy in today's society

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[2] It should be noted that in his earlier works Foucault employs what he calls an 'archaeological' mode of inquiry whereas in his later works he draws on the so-called 'genealogical' method. The premise of the archaeological method is that systems of thought and systems of knowledge are shaped by rules that operate beneath and above the consciousness of individual subjects. They provide a grid of understanding, conceptual possibilities, so to say, that determine the content and form of thought in a given domain and historical period. In 1964 in *History of Madness*, for example, Foucault 'excavates' – to use archaeological vocabularies - different discursive formations that structure talk and thought about madness from the 17th until the 19th century. Foucault states later that this type of archaeological analysis does not account for the study of the changes and transitions from one system of knowledge to another. Hence in *Discipline and Punish* in 1975, he introduces his genealogical method in order to pay attention to the on-going and historically shifting character of discourse (Kendall and Wickham, 1999). Genealogy also marks Foucault's turn to a more material perspective on discourse, stressing its practical and bodily dimensions (Oksala, 2013). It is crucial to note that whilst the present is inspired by Foucauldian analytics, especially by the material and spatial dimensions of it, it does neither provide an archaeology nor a genealogy of gyms in a strictly Foucauldian sense as both are first and foremost *historical* modes of inquiry whilst my focus is on contemporary gyms (see below for a more detailed discussion).

does not account for the same knowledge about fitness and health as promoted in the Greek gymnasium, nor is the present knowledge the 'logical' consequence of the past. This also raises the question of *how* some discourses shape and create meaning systems that gain the status and currency of 'truth', and thus sculpt or promote how people come to define themselves and organise their social environment. And, on the other hand, how other, alternative discourses are marginalised and excluded from emergence and circulation (Foucault, 1972, 1981).

To follow this line of thought, it is worthwhile to be reminded of Hook's (2007) argument that a Foucauldian analysis should not take into account only the material dimension but also the historicity of the phenomenon under study. However, I argue that one can also focus on the spatial and material coordinates of discourse without necessarily following a genealogical trajectory. Indeed, this is what marks the difference between a *discursive analytics* and a genealogy. Genealogy's principal aim is to re-construct the heterogeneous events and practices in the past that contributed to the emergence of certain 'truths' about subjects and objects in a given society (Foucault, 1977). Whereas a conventional historical analysis searches for origins in the form of a chronological development, genealogy alludes to a multifaceted past that is full of contradicting, abrupt or discontinuous events. Genealogy seeks to

> identify the accidents, the minute deviations - or conversely, the complete reversals - the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations which gave birth to those things that exist and continue to have value for us. (Foucault, 1977, p. 146)

The genealogist following Foucault's ideas would replace the notion of the origin with the notions of *descent* and *emergence*. Here, when events are traced back they refuse to be unified and are maintained instead in the dispersion that characterises their appearance. Foucault argues that the notion of emergence is opposed to a teleological view of history. The genealogist records series of events without assuming that they emerge to fulfil a purpose; he or she maintains the singularity and discontinuity of different beginnings, rather than presuming that they articulate identical meanings. Descent and emergence allude to two

interrelated points: first, meaning is never fixed, unified or homogenous but subject to transformations, contradictions and overlaps. Second, there is no linear development in history that starts at some point in the past and leads necessarily to a final, true, version of an object.

The implications of a genealogical enquiry

Based on an analysis of archival sources and other historical documents, a genealogical enterprise in this study would investigate how certain objects and subjects (e.g. 'the gym' as an institution or 'the fit body') were problematised and brought into existence in different times and locales. This complex emergence and shift of meanings could even be traceable for seemingly irrelevant objects, such as the treadmill. I would like to give a brief example of the treadmill here, a training device was firstly produced by an English company in the mid-1930s and was made available in the USA for purchase and use by private households – and not in Great Britain as one would assume (Popular Science, 1933; see figure 1). Again, this private use was made possible only by recognition of the treadmill's therapeutic benefits in medical spaces such as rehabilitation centres and hospitals. Oddly enough, almost at the same time, treadmills started to be used in barns, as well as on the back porch, the front lawn or in the kitchen to keep the animals fit (Modern Mechanix Magazine, 1930; see figure 2).

Figure 1 The treadmill as a training
device in the mid-1930s
(Popular Science, 1933, p.46)
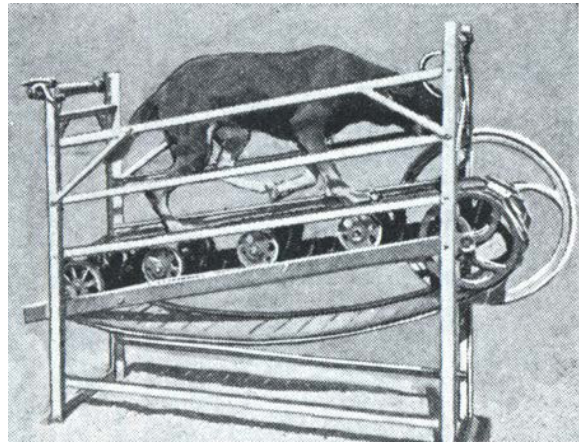
Figure 2 The treadmill for animals (Modern
Mechanix Magazine, 1930, page unknown)

This usage seems to have had nothing to do with the utilization of treadmills at the beginning of the 19th century in prisons as a form of moral orthopaedics: prisoners were forced to hang on to the bar and climb up the paddle blades, which made them constantly lift up their legs - a move that strongly resembles the modern elliptical machine at gyms (Bloom-Cooper, 1987; see figure 3). It can be said then, whilst they were initially meant as vehicles of punishment and vehicles designed largely for animal use, in the first half of the 20th century, treadmills were subject to a conceptual shift. Since then they are being thought solely as exercise tools whereas their other two other meanings seem to have disappeared. Nonetheless, one may ask whether the punitive and therapeutic dimensions of the treadmill may still be found in the workings of the modern gym.
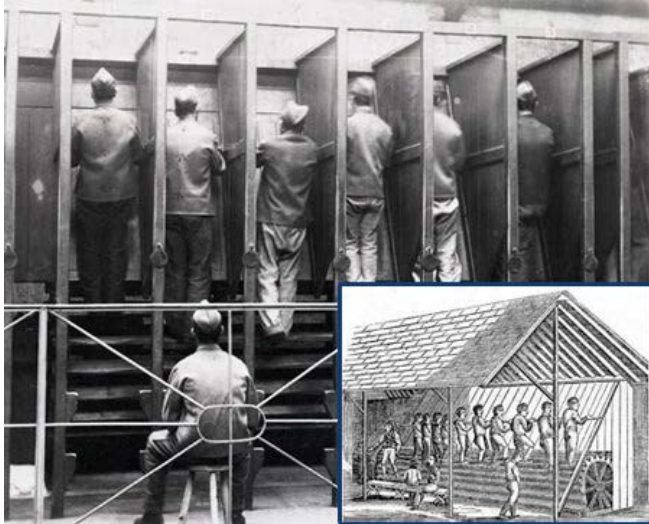
Figure 3 The treadmill as used in prisons of the 18th century

This brief attempt to historicize a single object such as the treadmill shows already what a genealogical lens would entail in addition to materiality, namely the historical conditions that gave rise from and to punitive practices. Without question, these are economic developments, theoretical schemas and technological novelties, juridico-political, scientific or architectural developments (Foucault, 1981b). Some Foucauldian scholars might argue that for a 'proper' discourse analysis the reconstruction of the epistemological, conceptual and practical shifts in the past are the *conditio sine qua non* if one wants to understand how present forms of knowledge about health and fitness are rendered possible. Despite the depth one would gain from historicising health and fitness, the present study refrains from such an undertaking here mainly because the principal research interest is not the object *per se* ('health and fitness'). My concern is particularly to understand how the spatial and material conditions in fitness locales are intertwined with the production of discourse and, as a consequence, produce certain 'subject-effects'. An additional genealogical enterprise would go beyond not only the scope of a project this size but it would also undermine and interfere with the original research motivation to utilize a particular version of discourse analysis (one that goes beyond the conventional scope of textuality and talk). My use of Foucault's work is eclectic, varied, rather than delimited to a particular period or method. By studying experiences, self-understandings, affects it goes even beyond Foucauldian concerns. In the following section I want to discuss

Foucault's theorization of the subject in more detail and specify what I mean by the 'subject-effects' of the gym.

2.3 The 'subject' in Foucauldian discourse theory

Discourse theorists sympathetic to Foucault often offer a quite a-psychological reading of discourse in which they either bracket out the notion of subjectivity in total, or regard the subject as an unavoidable 'discursive effect' that does not require a distinct analytical focus (for an overview and discussion see McHoul, 1993). One of the reasons why issues of subjectivity are circumvented is perhaps that the notion of the 'subject' somehow suggests agency on the side of the individual – something that Foucault would find difficult to accept. Foucault's statement that he always "sought to study…the way a human being turns him- or herself into a subject (…) Thus, it is not power, but the subject which is the general theme of my research" (Foucault, 1982, pp.208-209) signposts to the ambivalent role of the subject in Foucauldian theory.

To provide a historical backdrop to Foucault's thought, his body of work can also be read as a response to French phenomenology, a school of thought that he understood as "the philosophy of the subject" or "the philosophy of experience" (see Foucault, 1989). Foucault does not deliver a theory of the subject or the self that makes essentialist truth claims, that is to say, he does not make claims about how subjects are or they function from within (McGushin, 2013). At his most anti-humanist moment, he does not want to utilise a concept of the subject or subjectivity in any substantive way. The subject is there (e.g. the delinquent, the mad, the homosexual, the hermaphrodite etc.), but he or she seems indeed to be an 'an epiphenomenon, not a viable category of analysis in Foucault's work.[3] *Discipline and Punish* provides a good example for this type of analytics of power/knowledge: Here, Foucault shows how operations of power/knowledge render individuals knowable; how individuals can be made into subjects through the production of classifications, categories, and averages (Yates, 2014). What emerges is "knowledge of the criminal, one's estimation of him [sic], what is

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[3] Yet at the same time, there are moments that challenge this type of rejection, most notably in his last series of writings when he studies self-relational activities in the ancient Greek (1993, 1996).

known about the relations between him, his past and his crime, and what might be expected of him in the future" (Foucault, 1995,p.18).

Foucault neither prioritizes social actors in terms of who said or did what with which intentions, nor does he occupy itself with interpretations of subjectivity. In Foucauldian thinking, subjects seem to be constituted by forces beyond their control, and this seems to leave little room for agency or resistance (McNay, 1994). The unique authorial voice is clearly rejected by Foucault. He states that one should not try to

> rediscover beyond the statements themselves the intention of the speaking subject, his conscious activity, what he meant, or again, the unconscious activity that took place, despite himself, in what he said or in the a most imperceptible fracture of his actual words; in any case we must reconstitute another discourse, rediscover the silent murmuring, the inexhaustible speech that animated from within the voice that one hears, re-establish the tiny, invisible text that runs between and sometimes collides with them. The analysis of thought is always allegorical in relation to the discourse it employs. (Foucault, 1972, p.30)

To put Foucault's words differently, in the analysis of discourse he advises us to turn our attention towards *trans-individual* patterns of thought and behaviour in order to understand the logical and illogical structures and components of discourse. Foucault's subject is hence anonymous, nameless and faceless: he or she does not *create* discourse but holds instead a certain position within a discursive network that he or she re-cites or is enmeshed in. I agree with those feminist scholars such as Sawicki (1991) or Hartsock (1998), just to name a few, who argue that whilst Foucault's analyses of power and discipline are insightful, his theory does not provide any answers to how resistance to domination can be possible. As Roseneil and Seymour (1999) contend, poststructuralist theories of subjectivity tend to present a situation, in which the subject has little power against the domination of discourse, and hence little or no opportunity to reconstruct, or produce new identities. [4] I would also add that what is missing in

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[4] There are at least two responses to such a criticism: For one, negative criticism, that is, a diagnosis without a prognosis, can be useful in and of itself (e.g. Sawicki, 1991). Second, as Butler (1990) has famously argued, radical social constructionism in a Foucauldian vein does not equal determinism: "Construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency" (Butler, 1990, p. 147). Taking a Foucauldian approach to the body, Butler (1993) argues that the

Foucault's theory is not only an awareness of subjects' creative potential for change but also the entire field of experiences and affects – issues that I find crucial to study in order to understand how discourses are appropriated by subjects. People may not - at least for most of the time - the genuine producers of discourses and discourses may indeed be said to be engendered and perpetuated through an "anonymous field of practices" (Dreyfuss & Rabinow, 1982, p.69) but they, nonetheless, work on a subjective level; they produce 'subject-effects' and individuals are affectively invested in them.

If we take this line of thought further, and state that discourse requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced one could also argue that individual 'failure' can never be ruled out. Here, Foucault's (1995, p.170) statements that "the chief function of disciplinary power is to 'train'" and that "Discipline 'makes' individuals" can be turned against itself. What if individuals fail to be properly 'trained', that is what if they fail to re-enact certain discourses either involuntarily because they do not match the given categories of being or intentionally by not desiring to fit in and so actively participating within counter-discourses? In other words, whilst individuals may not author a discourse they may nevertheless disrupt it, obstruct its success. In this study, I will pay closer attention to behavioural *faux-pas* at the fitness sites, that is, the moments in which fitness participants fail to re-cite the 'appropriate statements' (here again, statements in a broader, not textually bounded sense); when behaviour causes unease either in the observer and/or in the actor herself because it does not follow the 'rules of play' (I have in mind here *faux-pas* like being naked just a bit too long in the locker room, not making the right noises during exercise, talking too much during class, not 'producing' enough sweat in class, just to give some examples). Also, I will analyse the accounts of people who have strong feelings towards the gym environment: people who have experienced training at gym perhaps as discomforting, or even threatening and consequently refuse to go there anymore.

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possibilities for bodies and embodied performances are nonetheless framed, and often constrained by dominant discourses. In her more recent work on intersex and transsexuals Butler (2004) elaborates on her view on bodies and agency though: here she argues that anyone who fails to fit the "dominant frame for the human" becomes dehumanised and potentially subject to symbolic or actual violence (Butler, 2004, p. 25).

Subjectification and Subjectivization

I would like to come back to the question I have proposed earlier, namely how to understand the process by which individuals appropriate, or 'take up' discourses: how they think, speak, feel towards themselves always in relation to discursive practices. Hook (2001) reminds us of Foucault's classification of the processes of *subjectification* and *subjectivization* that proves itself to be particularly useful for a psychosocially informed framework that takes issue with people's experiences of themselves and others. Subjectification refers to the ways in which discourse suggests certain subject-positions that can be inhabited by individuals – a process that is also central to other analytical strands such as CDA or DP, and often related to the process of 'interpellation' in an Althusserian sense. As Foucault (1997b) explains, the notion stresses "the different ways in our culture that humans develop knowledge about themselves…at different moments and in different institutional contexts" (Foucualt, 1997, p. 87). Subjectivization, on the other hand, describes a process that is located on a psychological level and it describes the (not always conscious) processes by which individuals 'personalize', take on, negotiate, or resist a more or less given subject-position and regimes of truth. With Foucault, subjectivization refers to the process of "how the subject constitutes itself in an *active* fashion" (Foucault, 1997b, p.291, emphasis added)

As Hook (2001) writes, the notion of 'subjectivization' can be read as a theoretical sophistication of what Foucault (1995) calls the 'soul-effects' in his earlier work *Discipline and Punish*. Here, Foucault describes the process in which disciplinary power produces certain ways of being, most notably through interventions upon the body. 'Subjectivization' stresses the workings of power/discourse at the level of the psyche more forcefully; it refers to the outcome of individual involvement, a process of being 'knitted into' the discursive field or, as one might call it, the psychological dimension of discourse. 'Soul-effects' can be attributed to "the normalizing power to produce personal identities, desires, habituated patterns of behaviour and conditions for how individuals speak about and interpret the world" (Eshleman, 2004, p.56). I use the term 'subject-effects' in the title of this thesis as I want to invoke Foucault's very notion of 'soul-effects', but, at the same time, strip it off its theological connotations.

Reading fitness magazines, assimilating their contents to one's own life or exercising with a personal trainer are certainly two common ways of actively seeking to subjectivize the gym experience. The phenomenon of personal training is interesting in this regard, too. To anticipate what will be discussed in more detail in one of the empirical chapters, regular one-to-one exercise with an expert in the gym seems to distinguish the gym user from the comparatively anonymous others; with a customized exercise schedule one may feel privileged and unique, and the fact that one pays for this service may not seem to overshadow this perception. Also, the continuous supervision and evaluation of one's progress, weight, strength and endurance through the expert, as well as constant calculations, time-tabling, documentation of personal challenges and 'victories' render the exercise genuinely *personal*. The fact that what looks like a pure business transaction can also transform into a friendship-like or, in some cases, even some sort of therapeutic relationship, may add significantly to the subject-effects of the gym, by which body work exceeds the corporeal and becomes a project for the construction of the self. On the other hand, what may be perceived as a unique experience can nonetheless a normalizing procedure. The customized calculations, timetables, and indeed the personal trainer him or herself may be part of the normalizing technology of the gym that strives towards the construction of an idealized form of being. The sum of these processes add a further "unprecedented depth and dimension to subjectivity" (Hook, 2007, p. 31).

To sum up, subjectification and subjectivization are two parallel, intertwined processes by which subjectivities emerge. Whilst the first notion can be said to describe the rather passive process of how discourses and power position subjects, the second term refers to the ways in which discourses unfold and become 'ownership'. The subject-effects of gyms is a term I chose to use not only to refer to these two parallel processes but also to emphasize the experiential, affective and relational underpinnings of them – issues that I will discuss in the next chapter. In the sections above, I often used the term 'discourse' in conjunction with 'power' without further explanation. In the following, I shall show how these concepts are interlinked in Foucauldian theory and must be thought as two dimensions of the same process.

2.4 The performative articulation of power

From a Foucauldian perspective, power is inextricably linked to the production of knowledge and the production of subjects, respectively, for "there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge which does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (Foucault, 1995, p.27). Hence, it is better to speak of the power/knowledge couplet to signify that the production of knowledge and operations of power are mutually co-constitutive and "directly imply one another" (Foucault, 1995, p. 27). It is worth opening this discussion with the following passage where Foucault states, that "One must remember that power is not an ensemble of mechanisms of negation, refusal, exclusion. But it produces effectively. It is likely that it produces right down to individuals themselves" (Foucault cited in Heyes, 2013, p. 159). Foucault's conceptualization extends the common understanding of power's workings to the micro-practicality of everyday life: rather than being a will or force imposed from above, power is located in the in-between of individuals and facilitates interaction. It is genuinely relational and perhaps best expressed not as a noun but as a verb ('to enact power'): power is dynamic, always performed and negotiated between people but it is never possessed. Indeed, *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1995) may well be read as a critical inquiry of a set of relationships: relations between soldiers and commanders, students and teachers, employers and employees, prisoners and security staff etc. In a similar vein, I want to study the relationships between trainers and trainees. However, I will not only look at the ways in which power operates but also at what power *does*, that is to say, what affective responses it invites and how it informs the ways in which gym participants understand themselves.

Foucault's conceptualization of power has ontological implications: power is constitutive of the subject, it creates types of individuals and ways of being; this is why Foucault speaks of power as being productive. He insists that one must refrain from describing operations of power in negative terms, for power does not only exclude, suppress, censor, conceal etc., but it produces truth-effects. As Heller (1996) pinpoints, power is a literally a *facility* and not a thing; it is a medium through which change is made possible. In Foucault's own words:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (Foucault, 1980b, p. 119)

Power in a Foucauldian vein describes the mechanisms, relationships and tactics that are dispersed in a society and are enacted in *every* encounter (Mills, 2004). As Foucault states:

(…) the exercise of power... is a way in which certain actions modify others... a total structure of actions brought to bear on possible actions. The exercise of power consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome. (Foucault, 1982, pp. 788-89)

According to this statement, power is to act upon, structure and guide the actions of others. In a similar vein, we could ask to what extent one can enact power upon one's self and body in order to determine one's own possible field of actions. Differently put, does the gym (or any other space) enable its users to develop an ability to change their own behaviours or relationships to themselves? If power opens up "a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions (…) may be realized" (Foucault, 1982, p. 221) to what extent does the gym's *modi operandi* themselves produce novel forms of being? These questions explain why a micro-physics of power is so relevant for this study: instead of looking at how a single subject exercises power, the focus is turned towards the processes by which subjects constitute themselves and are constituted in a *network* of power.[5]

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[5] Foucault's analytics of power/knowledge have been criticized on various grounds. Habermas (1986), for instance, claims that Foucault abstains "from the question of whether some discourse and power formations could be more legitimate than others" (Habermas, 1986, p. 282). According to Habermas, if power is all-pervasive there is hardly any reason for resistance. In a similar vein, Taylor (1986) criticizes Foucault for distancing himself from any political proposal of how power could be overcome. However, I would agree with Yates (2014) who notes that Foucault did explicitly refuse to suggest a program of political action and to state what must done: "He intended for his works to make it *more difficult* to speak for people in proposing what must be done on their behalf" (Yates, 2014, p.1483, emphasis in original).

In the context of fitness sites, this network is best understood as performativly constituted. Notions such as 'exercise', 'action', 'behaviour' and 'conduct' dominate Foucault's descriptions of power and make clear that one needs to move beyond language and grasp the practical dimensions of power. On the fitness site, the display of power may not always be subject to immediate observation but may only be experienced through participation. Here, the analytics of power at the gym will require a focus on local procedures and technologies, routines and rituals, micro-processes and micro-operations.   In short, it will require a focus on performed *practices*.

Recitational practices and performativity

Butler (1990, 1993) is one of the theorists who advanced this line of thought. Although her concern is with the construction and perpetuation of gender identities (at least, in her early works), her anti-essentialist theorization of the subject, in which she underlines the collapse of the discursive with the materiality of human bodies, can be extended a wider set of issues. Butler's subject is a series of points through which discourse flows, rather than the point from which discourse originates. Social practices are at the heart of Butler's works. She argues that some reiterative social practices can be said to be *recitational* in a sense that they performatively produce and re-produce certain discourses and call into being subjects and objects in certain ways. As she famously states, performativity pre-exists the performer: ontologically speaking, the discursive realm precedes the subject: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; ... identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results" (Butler, 1990, p. 25). Butler's concept of performativity allows a more embodied and interactional way of thinking about the relationships between social structures and subjectivities, something that is very much in line with a psychosocial approach. The distinction between 'performances' and 'performativity' will be dealt with in more depth in the following chapter when Goffman's work will be discussed. For now, it is enough to stress that 'performativity', as conceptualized by Butler, is not just a singular act but a reiteration of norms, norms that have assumed their normative status through their repetition, and through the recognition of the other (Nash, 2000). Appropriating Althusser (and Hegel, for that matter), Butler argues that the individual's status

depends on recognition. In order to *be,* that is in order to inhabit a subject-category, a person must display *recognizable* performances – performances that fall into the "matrix of intelligibility" of a given society in a given time (Miller, 2012). Only when these performances speak to the established grid of intelligibility, can they be recognized by other individuals, institutions, the state, etc.

As stated above, Butler presents a general theory, an abstraction of how subjects come into being and of how performative practices produce ontological effects and bring into being certain versions of realities (Butler, 2010). Her concept of recognition can be made fruitful for the empirical study of micro-practices at the gym where bodily display, visibility, and recognition play a crucial role, albeit on a different level. Exercising machines, for example, monitor one's bodily functions such as heart rate, burnt calories, speed and provide immediate feedback on users' bodily functions and translate them into a series of quantities that can then be evaluated in comparison to 'recognizable' norm values. To give another example, the many mirrors reflect and make visible gym participants' movements and appearances. On an interactional level, the reciprocal looks between exercisers on the gym floor as well as the observational, analytical and evaluative gaze of trainers provide opportunities for mutual recognition.[6] The presence of other, 'real' bodies during training and the many opportunities for self-observation through mirrors indicate the tremendous importance of visuality and bodily display in fitness locales. This calls for an analytical sensitivity to 'bodies-in-space' in relationship to one another - an issue that I elaborate in the next section.

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[6] In places like the gym, where one exercises with a group of others within the same enclosed area, it is almost unavoidable not to look at each other. However, these looks are not 'innocent' but gazing and being gazed at themselves are framed by certain discourses. As Urry (2011) writes, gazing "refers to the 'discursive determinations' of socially constructed seeing or 'scopic regimes'" (Urry, 2011, p. 110). Seeing, observing and monitoring are no naturally occurring phenomena and they are certainly not private. It is here that gazing, performance and power collapse into each other, they unfold in a relational space between the "gazer and the gazee" (Urry & Larsen, 2011) who wind up in 'a form of theatre,' with individuals constantly monitoring their performances and watching themselves being looked at (Berger, 1973). Hence being constantly watched is what one needs to take into account when one signs the membership contract. One could even go so far to say that gazing at one's own and other people's bodies and performances becomes at the gym a kind of 'right'.

2.5 Bodies-in-space

Foucault's works strongly underline the pivotal role of the human body in institutional settings (1988, 1984, 1994, 1995). A preoccupation with the body is retraceable in Foucault's earlier works, e.g. in *The Birth of the Clinic.* However, it is in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality* that the study of bodily procedures becomes intensified. Here, Foucault explicitly addresses the body as the object through which power operates and finds itself *actualized.* As he puts it, power "can very well be direct, physical, play force against force, bear on material elements, and yet not be violent; it can be calculated, organized, technically thought out; it can be subtle…and yet remain of a physical nature" (Foucault, 1995, p. 34). In meticulous detail, Foucault occupies himself with corporeal rituals of bodily discipline. Certain postures and gestures as well as the distribution of bodies in space, facilitate what may be called the corporeal making of subjects (e.g. the soldier, the delinquent, the homosexual). Here, the body as a material, visible and tangible entity is regarded as the locus of discursive practices, as the inscribed *surface of events* (Foucault, 1977). Each historical and political era exposes its subjects to different events but "it is always the body that is at issue – the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission" (Foucault, 1977, p. 25).

Body work is certainly at the heart of the gym experience. The gym may be seen as a place in which normalising, or even disciplinary, body techniques are employed that "invest it [the body], mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (Foucault, 1995, p. 25). The 'physical order' of power that circulates within the gym is mostly self-inflicted. The gym user, unlike Foucault's prisoner or medical patient, willingly initiates movements with or without the help of machines; he or she often takes up the subject-position of the trainer, the scientist, the nutritionist who investigates, manipulates and controls the body. A trained body with well-defined lean muscles and an 'optimal' balance between curves and bones symbolically displays the power of one's will, one's desire to be perfect, or simply one's ability to discipline one's self. One can perhaps speak of the fitness user's bodily rhetoric of accomplishment as analogous to Foucault's description of the soldier in *Discipline*

and Punish. Here, the soldier is someone who can be recognized by his use of his body, his use of space and time: he is one who displays the "bodily rhetoric of honour" (Foucault, 1995, p. 35). To be precise, the term 'rhetoric' is best understood here as a form of bodily performance, a gesture directed towards an audience in order to mark a certain state of being, in order to be *persuasive*.

In the case of the gym participant one could argue that this rhetoric is not only 'written' as a visible, legible mark in the outer appearance. As promotional material indicate, gym participants should also adopt certain dietary regimes, sleeping patterns, sexual life, hygiene rules and skin and body care. Involvement in fitness activities should optimally leave bodily 'traces' "in the form of habits, in behaviour" (Foucault, 1995, p. 35). Here, it is useful to bring in Bourdieu again. The question of how people "acquire the taste for sport, and for one sport, rather than the other" (Bourdieu, 1978, p.820), he writes, is ultimately informed by the socio-economic and cultural resources that they hold. Although fitness club membership is purchased widely across all social groups and is not distinctive to the elite, the habit of attending a gym or striving towards a muscular body are perhaps markers of certain understandings of the self or of general worldviews. One can certainly find a series of specific codes of conduct both across and within the gym environment analogous to Bourdieu's observations on bourgeois eating behaviours (e.g. small, quick and controlled movements to the mouth and smooth chewing), and thus explore in more general ways how 'fit subjects' mark their bodies.

Jäger (2007), who warns against theoretical pluralism and intellectual syntheses, particularly juxtapositions of Foucault and Bourdieu, remarks that discourse theory when "taken seriously" does not need additional approaches because it already accounts for embodiment. Admittedly, Bourdieu's and Foucault's do not only differ in their research questions and methodologies but their epistemologies and political commitments diverge, too. Whilst the former is interested in how class structure and social milieu enter the human body, the latter clearly opposes the supremacy of economic super-structure. However, they share a commitment to what might be called a performative ontology, the immediate relationship between doing and being. Bourdieu argues that internalized societal structures and

ideologies are themselves reproduced, or externalized, through the infinite repetition and rehearsal of human practice. Although the term 'ideology' would jar with Foucault's conceptual sensibilities[7], both authors are at pains to 'read' the embodied subject - a subject that, below the level of consciousness, actualizes and experiences herself through bodily practices and mundane activities such as particular ways of walking, or talking. In other words, discourse becomes subjectivized through embodied practices and experiences.

'Subject-effects' produced through embodied practices

If the body "gives rise to desires, failings, and errors" (Foucault, 1977 p.248), one could argue that bodily procedures - because they are experiential and sensual – produce stronger subject-effects than language-based utterances. As it is through the body that affects such as pain, pleasure, desire and disgust are experienced, one may speculate whether the whole field of scientific, moral, legal and political discourses must always inscribe itself into the body, too, in order to be subjectivized. For Foucault, it seems that what is done to and with the human body in public and private practices sheds not only more light upon a discursive field than what is merely verbally or textually communicated but it also deepens our understanding of how subjectivities emerge:

> …it (the soul) exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within, the body by the functioning of a power on those punished – and, in a more general way, on those one supervises, trains and corrects…over those who stuck at a machine and supervised for the rest of their lives. (Foucault, 1995, p. 29)

Even though Foucault refuses to use an explicitly psychological language here, he seems to imply that subject-effects ('soul-effects') emerge from corporeal practices. As discussed above, the body is both medium and target of power and "power needs to be traced upon the body precisely in order to create a more lasting order of soul-effects" (Hook, 2007, p.22). If to this we add Bourdieu's argument that subjects perceive themselves, and even *feel,* in certain ways due to their bodily orientation, we may ask to what extent affects work their way into

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[7] see Purvis and Hunt (1993) for an insightful discussion of how the Marxist notion of 'ideology' overlaps and differs from 'discourse' as understood by Foucault.

bodily articulation. One cannot ignore the affective dimension in fitness locales, something aptly put by Sassatelli:

> While fitness magazines are full of cheerful training scenes with beautiful, fit people working out together in an enthusiastic atmosphere, actual gym scenes are much less glamorous. Training may be a rather intimidating experience, especially for new gym members. (Sassatelli, 2010, p. 68)

Sassatelli describes the uneasiness one experiences in gyms: the "gym anxieties" brought about by the necessary display of one's body, the continuous encounter with one's reflection in the mirrors on every wall, comparing one's performance with others. What Sassatelli terms the "the emotional structure of training" resonates with Goffman's (1974) notion of the organizational *frame*. Here, he alludes to the affective functioning of institutions that organise personal involvement and pattern subjective experience in certain ways. I will turn to this point in the next chapter.

Affective responses in and to the gym

The central question here is to what extent instructed activities in this highly structured environment convey trans-individual affects. By this, I suggest that affects at the gym might have less to do with an individual's mood on a particular day, with her personal history, or with her attitudes towards the establishment *per se*. The question I would like to pose is whether affects can instead be generated *in situ* due to the physical and social given-ness of that particular environment? This is a conception of affects that Brennan (2004) describes as genuinely social, grounded in interaction and environment, not solely generated within a particular person but "from without" (Brennan, 2004, p.3). Affect, like the body, as one could argue, is not an *a priori* category, it does not precede discourse; it accompanies it, it is both its effect and its cause. Discourses that are void of passion, joy, fear, pity, pride, anger – discourses, in short, without an experience of personal intensity – are unlikely to maintain a grip on the subject. To put differently, discourses structure, limit, and engender particular affects to accomplish very particular objectives. Affective investments, one might say, are required in order to produce long-lasting subject-effects. Some may say that speaking of soul-effects in terms of affect-positions overstretches the scope of

Foucauldian discourse analysis. Although Foucault rarely speaks of affects and certainly does not want to accord them an explanatory role, the idea of trans-individual affects, or *affect-positions*, extends conventional ways of understanding discourses. Affect as a concept may be something that Foucault has consciously excluded from his analytical frame for good reasons, i.e. in order not to psychologize discourse. However, the generation of affects, understood if not totally as a-psychological but in a trans-individual way, plays a pivotal role in the production and subjectivization of discourses. This is why I want to deal with the gym's affective register.

2.6 Conclusion

Summing up, the overall task I set myself in this study is not only to examine how discourse 'enters,' and manifests itself in, the materiality of human practices, bodily performances and spatial configurations but also how it generates certain experiences and affective responses. Since the 'micro-physics' of power often operate on a corporeal level, and since bodily and the visceral experiences are key to affective experiences, it will be necessary to study those micro-level operations of power. The methodological implications of this imperative reach far: what we need in this study, then, is not only analysis of materiality of the fitness space. We also need to account for the affective investments and responses of its users. One way of pursuing this line of thought is to turn to the notion of 'spatiality' that condenses discursive, bodily and affective components and hence emphasizes the material and *lived* experience of discourse in tandem. More precisely, I suggest that one of the most promising ways to connect the material and affective anchoring of power and discourse within an institutional setting is to study the socio-spatial dynamics therein. To do this, I draw on a set of concepts in the next chapter: Turner's notion on liminal space, Foucault's theorization of heterotopia, Goffman's contributions to institutional life as well as Scott's re-conceptualization of it.

3

The affective and relational anchoring of discourse in space

This chapter is dedicated to the ways in which space in general, and the gym in particular can function as a discursive source that produces subject-effects on an affective and relational level. In the previous chapter it has been argued that one of the main ways in which discourses are being subjectivized is through the body. In this chapter I argue that the ways in which space is organised and lived is equally relevant for how subjects take on discourse. Overall, four different ways of conceptualizing and 'reading' space are discussed in this chapter: *liminality*, *heterotopia*, *total institutions* and *re-inventive institutions*. I show that these concepts are concerned with what space *does*, that is, how sociospatial practices have an effect on subjectivities, however, without explicitly dealing with the affective and relational dimensions of being-in-space. I suggest to widen the analytic scope of these theories, and to make them fruitful for a psychosocially informed research agenda.

3.1 The gym as a 'liminal' experience

Gyms may be described as small, enclosed islands in the city landscape that intermit the flow of everyday reality: that is, the noise, the traffic, the turmoil, the rain, and the monotonies of work-life. However, they also happen to be a part of the ordinariness of everyday routine themselves, an almost obligatory, yet voluntary, stop between office and home for many. Once a membership card is obtained, participants can dedicate themselves to body-work seven days a week. The aim is to train, to sculpt, or simply to experience, physicality. In a way, fitness clubs are contained spaces, they exhibit a carefully thought out and functional organization that prevents every possible distraction; not only is the locale partitioned into certain definable areas with different modes of activity but also each piece of equipment serves certain body parts and muscles areas. Each segment has its own conventionalized movements and the distribution of people within these spaces marks the gym as a place where different

groupings, who might not have much in common in the 'outside world', train in proximate distance to each other. This raises the question of how the presence of others, their exercising bodies, their looks, the noises they make and so on may affect gym users' experience.

Intimacy and distance

At the gym, people tend to be in a different bodily state than they usually are in a public setting: they sweat, hence their clothes are wet with perspiration; their hair is often damp and messy and they are out of breath, often making strained faces. The gym seems to 'allow' for these bodily imperfections to happen. As Klein (2001) writes:

> One has much more intimacy with the strangers at the gym than with almost any one else, save lovers or spouses. Body fluids, particularly sweat, flow freely at the gym, held in check by little more than the standard issue square towel given out at the front desk. In using the weight lifting machines, one places one's body upon the ghost of another. (Klein, 2001, p. 125)

The idea of a "ghost of another" that is always present on the gym floor points towards another issue, namely that gym space can also be said to be liminal in Turner's sense (1987) for the public/private binary is somehow blurred here. The gym is certainly private for it accepts only those who subscribe to a legally binding contract and pay regular fees but it bears also characteristics of a public space as – at least in principle – everyone is accepted as a member. Here, Rooney's definition of semi-private space as "a site of peculiar intimacies and coercions… self-revelations and decisive constraints" (Rooney, 2005, p. 334) is particularly useful:

> the semiprivate room shelters strangers who have in common the quite particular neediness that brings them there, in close proximity to each other and, crucially, available to a host of other people, most of them strangers as well. (Rooney, 2005, p. 335)

Rooney uses the primary school classroom as a model for her thinking about semi-private spaces but I would suggest that her descriptions are also well-suited to the space of the gym. To draw an analogy, the activities that occur in the gym and the classroom can be said to be individual endeavours. Although they are organized in a social setting, that is, in the presence of others, mostly strangers in the case of the gym, the aim is *individual* self-improvement. This is perhaps most evident in the distribution of bodies. Markula and Pringle (2006), for example, observe the following occupations of space in an aerobics studio: "each exerciser is claiming his or her own space instead of being engaged in a group task. Even in the group exercise studio, exercisers like to reserve their 'own' space" (Markula & Pringle, 2006, p. 75). In terms of the level of intimacy, an element of semi-private spaces that Rooney wishes to emphasize, one can say that there is less intimacy in the gym than in the home but still greater intimacy than in other public spaces such as public gardens, squares or museum. One may then ask what kind of relationships between trainees or between trainers and gym users emerge in this oscillation between intimacy and distance?

The gym as a threshold experience?

A third feature of the gym that qualifies the space as liminal refers to the rituals accomplished at the gym. It is again useful to think about liminality in the light of Turner's (1987, [1969]) notion of *liminal* space. With this notion Turner refers to a process, or more correctly to a ritual, through which individuals, groups or entire societies are about to transit from one identity stage or status to another. In his work, Turner borrows and expands upon Van Gennep's concept of liminality who qualifies liminality as a three-staged process: (1) separation, (2) liminal period and (3) reassimilation. Whilst Ven Gennep's aim is to describe the ways in which individuals acquire a new social status, Turner is particularly interested in the middle stage of this process, where the transition is being initiated but not yet consummated, where "the liminal persona remains invisible to the rest of the society ... She is no longer but also not yet. She has a physical but no social reality" (Turner, 1987, pp. 5-6).

Often liminal spaces are outside other social spaces and provide "a stage for reflection when people are withdrawn from their usual habits, ways of feeling, acting and thinking and reflect upon their own lives from a distant point of view" (Turner, 1987, p.14). Liminal spaces can enable a space for interrogating, contemplating and examining one's life. Further, liminal subjects are "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony" (Turner, 1987, p. 3). Liminality is a temporary and intermediate state *between* a starting and an ending point, not only in terms of its materiality and spatiality but also in terms of the subject who may experience herself as liminal and in-the-becoming. What the concept of liminal space characterizes is then the idea of 'threshold' experience: people do not inhabit liminal spaces for long periods of time but they pass through them. These places are intended to process people from one stage in their lives to the next; because of their ritualistic character they offer an intensified experience and yet they are transitional, and possibly transformative.

The application of Turner's concept to gyms has its limitations for the concept, located within the field of anthropology, seeks to understand culturally established rituals in hierarchically structured societies and not in post-industrial, liberal, democratic cultures. Notwithstanding the limitations of such an extrapolation, Turner's concept of liminality is useful here as it prompts us to think whether change in gyms may not only be accomplished on the level of personal fitness levels but also on the level of subjectivities. The concept draws our attention to the *transformative* force of reiterative, cultural practices and to the strategic role of spatial practices herein. In the context of this study, it also invites us to ask whether gym attendees feel that they undergo personal change and whether their ways of seeing and experiencing themselves are altered by the materiality of the setting and their involvement herein. This brings us to the question to what extent spatial organization and material practices may inform subjectivities in a more general sense, something I would like to shed more light on in the next section.

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3.2 Space and discourse

Social scientists from diverse backgrounds have been at pains to show that space must be regarded as a powerful force that is able to motivate or restrict human activities, organize interactions, distribute subjects and objects in certain ways, and inform identities (de Saint-Georges, 2004; Sayer, 2000, Dixon & Durrheim, 2000). For Lefebvre space is first and foremost *lived*:

> Activity in space is restricted by that space; space 'decides' what activity may occur, but even this 'decision' has limits placed upon it.… Space commands bodies, prescribing or proscribing gestures, routes and distances to be covered. It is produced with this purpose in mind; this is its *raison d'être*. (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 143, emphasis in original)

As Massey (2005) argues, spaces should not merely be regarded as social products or cultural artefacts but space itself may produce, shape and inform the social and, one may add, the discursive field. Along with this line of thought, gym space can be understood as more than a static, framing background but as the very junction where discourse inscribes itself materially, bodily, relationally and affectively (Harvey 1989, 1990; Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1989, 1996; Gregory & Urry, 1985). The mutually constituting relationship between the spatial and the discursive invites us to 'read' and to decipher the socio-spatial practices at the gym. This is because space has at least two characteristics. For one, space resembles the symbolic, or textual, realm insofar as it always *signifies* something extra-spatial, that is to say, its meaning reaches far beyond its mere practical use. Parks, monuments, museums, cemeteries are not only functional architectural constructions but they are also social phenomena that bring about a whole set of meanings into play. They may evoke memories, inform affects and engender phantasies (Bachelard, 1994). It is useful to draw on an example here. As Sullivan (2014) writes about feelings of 'pride':

> pride is not simply a matter of a person's own internal thoughts or representations that he or she can take pride in a given achievement … as wider discourses, practices, and ideologies provide the normative background crucial to individual claims. (Sullivan, 2014, p.1501)

The materiality of the gym machine paves the way for affective responses such as pride to emerge. Each machine sets little 'challenges' (weights, repetitions, sets etc.) that users can either master or fail to master. Because gym exercise is underpinned by a range of procedures that primarily target the body and enhance its qualities, it may evoke affective response related to self-mastery such as self-contentment, pride and enjoyment which then may validate certain discourses. Second, it can be said that space itself make may substantiate discourse. In some cases, a particular spatial organization may even be understood as an attempt to transform discourse into 'solid' knowledge (e.g. walls that substantiate identity categories and mark and justify the difference between 'we' and 'them').

My underlying assumption here is that it is not discourse which brings a particular space into existence *post res* but that space itself accompanies, or may even precede, discourse. The very existence of a fitness club, for example, does not only mirror prevalent discourses on the ideal body or desirable life: the gym's spatial availability also substantiates those notions. This is not necessarily because authorities such as fitness trainers or nutritionists prescribe what to do and how to be but because everyone in the space *acts* according to some underlying, taken-for-granted, spoken and unspoken principles suggested by and inscribed into its working principles. In more general terms, gym space frames the array of activities and practices that can be potentially enacted there. Schools, prisons, hospitals, shopping malls, museums, to name other examples, are all social spaces that can be 'read' and hence elucidate how society conceives and handles childhood, deviant behaviour, dis-functioning bodies, consumption and art. To reiterate, these places do not only mirror, sustain and reinforce discourses, but they also generate – borrowing Foucault´s notion – certain 'regimes of truths'.

The spatial distribution of individuals
Foucault´s engagement with spatial relations is well documented and implicit in all his writings (Johnson, 2006; Hannah, 2007) but perhaps most overt in his two studies *The Birth of the Clinic* and *Discipline and Punish* as well as in a number of shorter

works (e.g. Foucault, 1980a, 1997). The spatial exclusion and ordering of madness in asylums, of deviant conduct in prisons, of illness in hospitals, or the confinement of sexuality in brothels and bedrooms are a few of the many examples throughout Foucault's analyses. The use of spatial registers is perhaps not too surprising as Foucault locates power in the microphysical; in the events played out between people and objects which cannot be but geographically bounded. When he writes about the genealogy of sexuality for example, he strikingly shows that even though human sexuality was not spoken about in pedagogical establishments of the 18th century, it was nonetheless inscribed into the very spatiality of the institutions:

> …one only has to glance over the architectural layout, the rules of discipline, and their whole internal organization: the question of sex was a constant preoccupation. The builders considered it explicitly. The organizers took it permanently into account. All who held a measure of authority were placed in a state of perpetual alert. The space for classes, the shape of the tables, the planning of the recreation lessons, the distribution of the dormitories (with or without partitions, with or without curtains), the rules for monitoring bed time and sleep periods-all this referred, in the most prolix manner, to the sexuality of children. (Foucault, 1984, pp.27-28)

This quote shows the powerful effects of space that go beyond language: it may be unintentional, or even undesirable of the authorities, managers and architects to problematize a certain topic (here: sexuality) *expressis verbis*, but the organisation of space inevitably calls for certain behavioural codes and underlying systems of meanings that make the topic nonetheless omnipresent – not so much on a verbal, but on a practical and spatial level.

A source where the intertwined relationship between power/discourse and space becomes evident is also *Discipline and Punish*. Here, as Elden (1998) rightly points out, Foucault does not only examine the development of the penal system in certain eras but the policing of society as a whole through spatial registers. The spatial distribution of individuals in prisons, military, schools, monasteries, hospitals or factories, so Foucault maintains, strongly resemble each other due to their similar use of techniques and strategies. *Enclosure*, or confinement, as the most common strategy

in these institutions is marked by a *partitioning* through which "each individual has his own place; and each place its individual" (Foucault, 1995, p. 143). The precise designation of areas to specific purposes and types of people, the compartmentalisation of space, seem to play a crucial role in disciplinary power, as he further oberserves. This geographical subdivision goes hand in hand with the space's *functionality*. That is, the partitioning prepares the grounds for space to be coded and utilized in certain ways. Lastly, as Foucault observes, these enclosed, partitioned, and coded sites follow the logics of classificatory systems, *ranks*. Here the spatial organisation of school classes is a good example:

> …each pupil, according to his age, his performance, his behaviour, occupies sometimes one rank, sometimes another; he moves constantly over a series of compartments – some of these are 'ideal' compartments, marking a hierarchy of knowledge or ability, others express the distribution of values or merits in material terms in the place of the college or the classroom. (Foucault, 1995, p.147)

This quote helps us to accentuate the oscillatory moment, and sometimes collapse, between the material and the non-material. Without question fitness spaces are real – they are built environments consisting of rooms, equipment and people. But, as it is emphasized in the quote above, they are also 'ideal' as the ways in which these materials are given meaning to and utilized by people enable characterisation, assessments and hierarchies.

When analysing fitness spaces Foucault's method of 'dissecting' space will be useful as it will help to outline the very logics of space and enable us to draw conclusions about the micro-physics of power. It should also be noted that, in this work, I do not only want to study spatiality and materiality as if those were inhabited but also the *actual* use of gym space. As the following citation illustrates, Foucault himself may have recognized the potential gap that may arise between written plans and well-designed spaces and their actual implementation:

if I had wanted to describe real life in the prisons, I wouldn't indeed have gone to Bentham. But the fact that real life isn't the same thing as theoreticians' schemas doesn't entail that these schemas are therefore utopian, imaginary etc. That would be to have a very impoverished notion of the real . . . the elaboration of these schemas corresponds to a whole series of diverse practices and strategies . . . [and] . . . induce[s] a whole series of effects in the real (which isn't of course the same as saying they take the place of the real): they crystallise into institutions, they inform individual behaviour, they act as grids for the perception and evaluation of things. It is absolutely true that criminals stubbornly resisted the new disciplinary mechanism in the prison; it is absolutely correct that the actual functioning of the prisons, in the inherited buildings where they were established and with the governors and guards who administered them, was a witches' brew compared to the beautiful Benthamite machine. (Foucault, 1981, p. 10)

Foucault acknowledges here that there might indeed be a difference between abstract theory and actual practice. However, he also makes clear that he is first and foremost interested in theories, or what he calls schemas, as they inform behaviour and perception. In this study I take an alternate route to what Foucault suggests here. I wish to study the 'real' life of the gym which requires me to be *physically* on the site, to participate in gym exercise rather than studying how machines are designed how they operate in theory.

3.3 Heterotopia: spaces of 'other-ness'

Explicit attention to a certain mode of space is paid by Foucault both in a lecture given in 1967 when he introduces his notion of the *heterotopia* to a group of architects and, more systematically, in an essay titled *Of other spaces* translated into English in 1986. By employing the notion of heterotopia Foucault offers a conceptual means by which space can be analysed both from within and in relation to social dynamics. More specifically, in his essay, Foucault describes actual architectural sites in a society that fundamentally differ from all the others, either by their meaning or their "alternative way of doing things" (Hetherington, 1997, p. VIII). In the following, I shall first present the key characteristics of heterotopia as theorized by Foucault, and then explain how the concept may be applied to the present study.

Foucault distinguishes two different kinds of heterotopia that seem to serve the same goal – namely the spatial isolation of subjects and objects. *Places of crisis* as "sacred or forbidden places that are reserved for individuals who are in relation to society and to the human environment they live in, in a state of crisis" (Foucault 1997a, p. 353) are considered almost as a privilege for those who inhabit them. *Places of deviation,* on the other hand, are assigned to people whose behaviour, worldview etc. is considered to be distorted, outside the norm and for some reason (e.g. morally or politically) considered as threatening for the rest of the society. As the heterotopia is identified as 'other', as a place of alternative ordering where "sites of all things are displaced, marginal, novel or rejected" (Hetherington, 1997, p. 46), its analysis is necessarily linked to all the spaces it stands in contrasting relation to. This relation can be two-fold: either the heterotopia attempts to achieve the state of a phantasmatic, almost utopian (i.e. unreal) place, or it strives towards a concrete place that is just better arranged than all the rest. Striking examples for the former can be holiday villages, cruise ships, wellness retreats or funfairs that, due to their organization and physical layout, have some sort of a magical, or dream-like, feel for the visitor. Characteristics of the latter on the other hand, can surely be found in music festivals, boarding schools, gated communities, or prisons in which the place functions as a societal strategy, establishing or maintaining a particular social order.

From this two-fold distinction given above, different conclusions can be drawn: firstly, the 'otherness' inherent to heterotopia does not automatically mark an improvement over the *status quo*. In other words, heterotopia can assemble places of subversion or places of conformity, conversation or even domination (see prisons or gated communities). Secondly, heterotopic spaces are on the border between what is real and what is imagined for they are locatable on the map but always evoke more than what their geographical concreteness indicates: they are always also spaces of illusion, of *projection.* Although Foucault does not draw upon this point in depth, projection may be understood almost as a psychic mechanism here; it may mean that society's concerns, fears, illusions, desires and fantasies are reflected in those places of otherness, that they are produced and 'administered' in them.

Perhaps this slippage between the real and the imagined explains best why heterotopia are relationally different from the remaining places as they offer something outside of everyday landscapes and therefore outside the usual array of experiences: they transgress our usual perception and offer an exceptional physicality and an exceptional mental and sensual experience. This is not only due to their geographical distinctiveness, but also to the fact that heterotopia generate their own distinctive sense of time. Often one finds in places of otherness a break with conventional time, that is, the time experienced in everyday life. As Foucault asserts, the experience of time can be manipulated in different ways: e.g. in terms of accumulation (like in libraries or museums where history is archived), or in terms of abolition (like at festivals or in vacation villages where time is almost forgotten or without significant meaning). The underlying assumption here is that time is socially constructed, produced and organized and yet individually experienced. Through a displacement of time, the ways in which temporality is experienced, namely in an unusual, alien or disrupted way, is being manipulated.

Another of Foucault's criteria focuses on the ways in which many different spaces converge and become entangled in one single place, even though they might fundamentally be different or even contradictory. Looking at the gym, one could assume that it joins leisure and work. Also with its numerous members it is a highly social place and yet working-out can be a very lonely activity. In this sense, heterotopia must be seen as a multi-dimensional, complex collection of different, and sometimes even contradicting registers. At the heart of heterotopia is also the question of accessibility. Heterotopia are systems of inclusion and exclusion, places that are isolated but still penetrable through certain rituals and gestures: that is, particular ways of acting and being. In fitness sites, one can understand this principle as an aspect of formal entry requirements such as membership or of more performative ways of signifying that one is fully, dedicatedly and genuinely a member of that space. Here, the right outfit, the skilful handling of equipment, the single-mindedness and drive during exercise, the comfortableness with bodily display and nudity all indicate that one belongs to that space, that one is, under no circumstances, out-of-place. Lastly, Foucault points to the varied meanings and

functions a particular place can have in an historical context. In other words, the modes of operation in a heterotopic place are always dynamic, unnstable, not necessarily linear and anticipatable, and thus exposed to various uses and interpretations in the course of history.

Empirical applications of this concept deal with a variety of spatial arrangements in which social interaction takes place: public libraries (Lees, 1997), hotels (Kezer, 2004; Soja, 1996), theme parks such as Disneyland (Phillips, 2002), new forms of dwelling such as in gated communities (Low, 2008; Hook & Vrdoljak, 2002) and shopping malls (Kern, 2008). Even Dubai, due to its gigantic architecture, excessive expenditure and artificiality has been characterized as a place of otherness (Petti, 2008). From the examples given in the literature one can see the wide range of spaces that can, because of their otherness, be regarded as forms of heterotopia in a Foucauldian sense. However, to specify a place as a heterotopia, to pin it down to a distinct location – as most of the related empirical research does – is not unproblematic as it bears the danger of identifying almost every place in a society as heterotopic and thus risks losing its analytical power (Saldanha, 2008). Also, it is not easy to say whether the widespread fitness gym can be identified as a heterotopia. This is because Foucault's term points to places that interrupt everyday space by offering an alternative spatiality. Looking at the gym, the contrary seems to be the case: it has certainly become part of ordinary everyday space and is part of the sameness and uniformity that characterizes most public and private spaces in the urban landscape. As Dehaene and De Cauter (2008) remark, "in our contemporary world heterotopia is everywhere. Museum, theme parks, malls, holiday resorts, wellness hotels, festival markets- the entire city is becoming 'heterotopian'" (Dehaene & De Cauter, 2008, p.5). This evokes the question of whether, when engaging with the concept, one is obliged to call distinct spaces heterotopia, or whether one should rather acknowledge these spaces as having "concrete technologies and rhetorical machines" (Faubion, 2008, p.33). In Foucault's own words, perhaps it is best to use his concept as "the study, analysis, description and the 'reading' ... of these different spaces" (Faubion, 1997, p. 17).

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Even though it is possible to argue that Foucault is keen to show the relationships between space and discourse throughout all his scholarly writings, many critics have remarked that his heterotopia essay lacks Foucault's usual depth and rigour (McLeod, 1996). The reason why this work appears underdeveloped and provisional to some is certainly due to the text's fairly short length and the fact that the heterotopia as an analytical tool is never used by Foucault directly. Whilst pointing towards a set of general examples he never applies his seven criteria to a concrete spatial site. However, one must note that the spaces cited in the essay (e.g. prison, psychiatric clinics, hospital) are - if not under the umbrella term heterotopia – nonetheless discussed in Foucault's other monographs. As Elden contends:

> Foucault's historical studies are spatial through and through, and…this is the fundamental legacy of his work to those interested in the question of space - rather than the two figures to which so much study has been given: the Panopticon and heterotopias. (Elden, 1998, p.191)

One must, then, assume a connection between Foucault's heterotopia essay and his overall scholarship. As stated above, Foucault is generally concerned with space because of its relevance for the workings of power and discourse. So perhaps it is best to read the heterotopia essay alongside Foucault's other works, most prominently *Discipline and Punish*. In order to follow an analytical direction, that does not only describe the fitness locale as a heterotopia, the present research will take the analytic potential of this notion as a vantage point. With Hetherington (1997), "sites, buildings, indeed a whole spatial and material fabric of society can be seen as 'text', and heterotopia can operate in them just as they can in books" (Hetherington, 1997, p.51). Hetherington underlines here what has been previously said about space as always signifying something extra-spatial.

Hook's (2007) 'translation' of the Foucauldian concept into analytic vocabularies, with his purpose of understanding the inner dynamics of a site in discursive terms, is also very much related to such a textual understanding: heterotopia here does not predominantly refer to a certain kind of space, rather, according to Hook, "it is a

particular way to look at space" (Hook, 2007, p. 186). What Hook suggests here is that it might be more fruitful to read the heterotopia essay almost as a methodological 'guideline' through which spaces can be analysed. As it will be shown in the methodology chapter, I have followed Hook's suggestion and translated Foucault's list of criteria to a set of analytic vocabularies. A major advantage of such a Foucault-inspired analysis of the fitness sites is that it addresses the complexity of space by asking for the formal and informal structure, organisation, architectural design, operating technologies and mechanisms on the one hand, and the social meanings that are attached to it on the other.[1]

3.5 Lived experiences and affective responses to space

Human geographers have stated that spaces are made in an on-going, contingent sense, in styles that are not only symbolic, but performative, embodied, material, and affectual (Thrift, 2004, 2007; Dewsbury et al., 2002; Gieryn, 2002; Law, 2002; McCormack, 2003). Thrift (2004) for example contends that places display varying degrees of intensity and thereby evoke different affective responses. He argues that this is because places facilitate certain practices and experiences and therefore make certain affects more available than others. As Thrift states at length:

> Increasingly, urban spaces and times are being designed to invoke affective response according to practical and theoretical knowledges that have been derived from and coded by a host of sources. It could be claimed that this has always been the case – from monuments to triumphal processions, from theatrical arenas to mass body displays – and I would agree. […] But what I would argue is different now is both the sheer weight of the gathering together of formal … [and] … practical knowledges of affective response that have become available in a semi-formal guise (e.g. design, lighting, event management, logistics, music, performance), and the enormous diversity of available cues that are able to be worked with in the shape of the profusion of images and other signs, the wide spectrum of available technologies,

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[1] An author who is often associated with such a concern for spatial practices and material objects is certainly Latour. With his notion of 'affordances' he seeks to conceptualize the 'agency' and 'life' of non-living objects, and the inextricable co-constitution of subjects and objects. Indeed, there are attempts to apply Latourian and Foucauldian notions in conjunctions (for an overview see Pyyhtinen and Tamminen, 2011).

and the more general archive of events. The result is that affective response can be designed into spaces, often out of what seems like very little at all. Though affective response can clearly never be guaranteed, the fact is that this is no longer a random process either. It is a form of landscape engineering that is gradually pulling itself into existence, producing new forms of power as it goes. (Thrift, 2004, p. 67f)

So, spaces such as gyms do not only provide their users with versions of knowledge on how to be fit and healthy, but through the ways they are internally organised they do also pave the way for possible ways of feeling about the environment and the self. The design, lighting, management, logistics, music and performance, in Thrift's words, have a certain discursive functionality and produce certain affects. Indeed, "there are no neat and easy dividing lines between physical affects and discourse, or between discursive capture and affective capture, or between discursive enlistment and affective enlistment" (Wetherell, 2014, p.14). Some spaces, one may argue, incite certain affective patterns which may not always be conscious. As Wetherell (2014) further argues, affects are in-between, they are relational, and they emerge in situations and in reference to other subjects or objects. That is why "research on everyday, live affective scenes, events and episodes" and "the practical human relational work in an episode of affect" is so relevant (Wetherell, 2014, p. 21). This leads us back to the bodily and practical dimensions of subjectivity and to the question of how these two are tied back to space. Casey who wants to stress the subject-effects of space underlines the relationship between space and the self as following:

> We are not the masters of place but prey to it; we are the subjects of place or, more exactly, subject to place. Such subjection ranges from docility (wherein we are the mere creatures of a place, at its whim and in its image) to appreciation (by which we enjoy being in a place, savouring it) to change (whereby we alter ourselves—our very self—as a function of having been in a certain place) …. To be [a] subject to/of place is to be what we are as an expression of the way a place is. (Casey, 2010, p. 688)

The fact that there are places such as gyms fosters the thought that one ought to invest money, time and effort in order to be a certain type of subject. Similar remarks can be made in terms of the site's internal organisation which sets even more complex, and subtle meaning systems into play.

The relationship between space and the sense of self is also conceptualized by Dixon and Durrheim (2000) who regard space as a source for subjectivity. Here, the authors emphasize that spatial practices are discursively constructed and hence are affected by historical, political and cultural variables. Their notion of 'grounds of identity' is defined as: "first, as a sense of belonging to places; and second as a rhetorical warrant through which particular social practices and relations are legitimated" (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000, p. 33). In order to study both people's sense of belonging and spatial rhetoric they suggest that one needs a broader notion of textuality that embraces "people's embodied transactions with material settings…involving usage of architectural styles, layouts or forms of ornamentation" (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000, pp.41-42).

In order to fully grasp the *subjectivizing* effects of fitness gyms, that is to say, the ways in which they inform the subject's thoughts, action and affects, a detour to Goffman proves itself to be useful, too. Goffman is valuable for the present project as he uses the institution as a starting point to explore how it "can be viewed as a place for generating assumptions about identity" (Goffman, 1991, p.170). Goffman takes much time to describe and understand people's involvement in institutionalized and public settings in which verbal communication is only one side of the coin. He makes use of observational and ethnographic data whilst texts serve only as secondary sources. Hence he offers an exhaustive way of looking at social space from a material, and here especially from an interactional, perspective. The present research on fitness spaces can further benefit from a dialogue with Goffman as his sociology examines how experience and the individual's sense of the self are organized through organizing 'frames' specified by institutionalized and semi-institutionalized sites. Again, the ultimate goal is to outline a vocabulary that attunes to the analysis of the

discursive by linking it to its material dimensions that themselves have an effect on subjectivities. The gym is, thus, both the object of this study and an empirical example of how discourse can be studied as embedded in interactional, performative and affective dynamics.

3.5 Studying the mundane with Goffman

According to Goffman (1991[1961]) institutions fulfil certain functions in society. They serve either the majority – the general public comprising normal, healthy and well-functioning citizens – or they are designed to contain malfunctioning, deprived, sick or threatening minority groups. Schools, army barracks, work camps, and ships are only a few examples of the first mode of functioning whereas prisons, mental hospitals, orphanages, retirement homes and hospitals are illustrative of the second. These localities are in some cases established to protect the majority from a threatening minority or, in other cases, to support an underprivileged group of people. Goffman's analyses are mainly concerned with the latter category and most notable, in the theorization and empirical study of what he terms *total institutions*.[2] He bluntly defines institutions as "places such as rooms, suites of room, buildings, or plants in which activity of a particular kind regularly goes on" (Goffman, 1991 [1961], p.15). A total institution on the other hand exhibits more severe qualities, it is "a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life (Goffman, 1991, p.11).

Total institutions
Goffman describes different types of total institutions in which each of them can be qualified according to their *function*, degree of *totality* and mode of *entering*. By 'function' he refers to the societal rationale of the institution such as to care for the underprivileged; to contain those with an infectious illness; to protect society from dangerous others; to facilitate collective projects such as education or work and to provide a retreat for those who want to distance themselves from mainstream society

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[2] Interestingly, Goffman's *Asylums* was published the same year as Foucault's *Civilization and Madness*, thus both contributing to the intellectual base of the anti-psychiatry movement (Scott, 2011).

are the five functions that Goffman singles out. By 'total' or 'totality' Goffman refers to four common principles of institutional life: (1) a daily round 'in the same place and under the same authority'; (2) activities carried out in the company of similar others; (3) timetabled activities that follow clear rules in the presence of designated officials; (4) scheduled activities that are part of a plan, designed to realise the goals of the institution (Goffman, 1961, p. 6). The last category of which Goffman speaks is the mode of entering, or, what may also be called the 'mode of recruitment': entering total institutions can either be performed involuntarily with the prison being the typical case, or voluntarily. However, even if entering is a voluntary act it can nevertheless be subject to a selection procedure (e.g. application to high-ranking universities or monasteries). Finally, recruitment and entering might also be semi-involuntary: where once one voluntarily entered the social establishment one now has to follow certain rules to remain there. These rules can be experienced as involuntary and yet advantageous.

The subject-effects of institutions

Whilst Goffman does begin with a description of institutional practices, physical layout and imposed regularities he often ends with the individual. Therefore, it is not surprising that notions such as 'self', 'personhood', 'individual' and 'identity' can be found in many of his writings. However, his conceptualization of subjecthood undermines the idea of a sovereign and unique self (Smith, 2006). "While it may be true that the individual has a unique self all his own" Goffman writes, "evidence of this possession is thoroughly a product of joint ceremonial labor" (Goffman, 1967, p. 85). This understanding of the self perhaps best explains why Goffman chooses to look at 'visible' aspects of the social world, that is, at social interactions, face-face encounters as well as individual and collective conduct. One might say that for Goffman the study of the self is always through the *empirical* study of the social world. Hence, it is not surprising that Goffman - although not completely rejecting the idea of an inner world or individual psyche – omits people's thoughts or felt affects in his works.[3]

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[3] Smith (2006) summarizes the criticisms raised against Goffman's conceptualization of the 'self'

It should be added that the study of social interaction comprises more than face-to-face encounters between individuals. In many of his works, Goffman takes issue with institutional practices, procedures and rituals, which, so he argues, have an impact on the individual's sense of self. Indeed, he writes in *Asylums* that the aim of his 12 months' ethnographic fieldwork was to "learn about the social world of the hospital inmate, as this world is *subjectively experienced* by him (*sic*)" (1961a: ix; emphasis added). Mundane directives in institutions, such as the prohibition of eating with no cutlery other than spoons on psychiatric wards or the deprivation of personal belongings in prisons, are only two of Goffman's many examples of how institutions destabilize the individual, engendering novel, negatively charged inmate identities. Hence seemingly pure material practices touch upon deeper, psychological levels, confronting the subject with new expectations about which qualities she ought to have as a member of this establishment in particular, and as an individual in this world in general. In Goffman's own words:

> Built right into the social arrangements of an organization, then, is a thoroughly embracing conception of the member – and not merely a conception of him *qua* member, but behind this a concept of him *qua* human being…In telling what he (*sic*) should do and why he should want to do this, the organization presumably tells him all that he may be … clearly pointing to the question of identity and self-definition. (Goffman, 1991, pp.164-165)

In terms of the present study one can suggest that discursive practices in gyms do not solely embrace the subject as a fitness participant but those practices engender a general ontological category, "a person of a given character and being" (Goffman, 1991, p.160). One might expect that promoted personality traits, rituals, behaviours,

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as follows: By making use of dramaturgical concepts such as 'impression management', 'role distance' etc. Goffman seems to suggest a hidden, real self in contrast to a false self. I would agree with such a criticism as, it is highly debatable whether such an essential kernel of subjecthood exists at all and whether people are consciously trying to manipulate their environment in the ways that Goffman suggests. Further, critics have argued that Goffman's analyses do not give a full account of human subjectivity for his works do not account for a psychic reality. Whilst this may be the case one could argue that Goffman's omission of an inner world and his focus on organizational structures and face to-face interactions do not stem from a lack of awareness but are rather a conscious choice to problematize a certain area of the social world.

habits and thoughts go far beyond the fitness site, they are taken back 'home'. The subject-categories institutional practices generate are not fixed, though.

According to Goffman one can clearly observe how subjectivities are constantly in-the-making. The author speaks of the 'moral career' of an inmate when he describes the different stages of being – such as when patients have just been admitted to the psychiatric unit, when they have been there for a while and when they are released from the hospital. This raises the question of whether one can speak of a 'moral career' in the context of this study, too. Does the sense of self at the gym change over time, and if so, to what extent is the sense of self prior to the gym regime different to the sense of self after? Goffman argues that whilst institutions seek to produce certain versions of individuals, inmates are not passive but may create what the author calls an 'underlife' in organisations. He observes that "we always find the individual employing methods to keep some distance, some elbow room, between himself and that with which others assume he should be identified" (Goffman, 1991, p.319). Goffman appreciates here the possibility of contestation of the organisational order, arguing that it is more the rule than the exception that individuals reject and distance themselves from institutionally prescribed identities.[4]

To recapitulate the argument: Goffman's analytics of total institutions are essentially analytics of the subject – a subject which is constituted by organizational, socio-spatial and administrative arrangements. And indeed this comes very close to a Foucauldian conceptualization of discourse as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p.49). If one takes this seriously, one must infer that a discourse analysis that takes the material aspects of social life into

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[4] One cannot but recognize the conceptual similarity between Goffman and de Certeau here: Both place resistance in the realm of everyday practices such as in talking, reading, moving about, shopping, dwelling cooking, etc.). Simply put, for de Certeau (1984) practices are tactical in character when they seek to manipulate a given 'order of things' *within* the limits of this order: "The space of a tactic is the space of the other", he writes, "thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power.… it is a manoeuvre "within the enemy's field of vision"… It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse" (de Certeau, 1984 p.37). Indeed, de Certeau criticizes Foucault for not being attentive enough to 'scattered' social practices that are being marginalized. He maintains that although tactics may not erase privileged ways of speaking and thinking, they may still inform them.

account cannot do without the meticulous study of interpersonal and institutional practices of fitness sites. Such an analytical path is crucial if one wants to understand how subjectivities of fitness participants are grounded in the very materiality of daily action.

The dramaturgical approach to social life

Foucault (1972) explicitly refers to 'rituals of speaking' as one of the forms through which discourses are governed. With 'ritual' he refers to the set of gestures, behaviours, circumstances and signs that accompany the speaking subject, or in his own words "the qualification which must be possessed by individuals who speak" (Foucault, 1972, p. 220). In a way, he reminds us to pay attention to the behavioural extensions of the verbal performance of discourse. *Interaction order,* a term that Goffman coined, on the other hand, emphasizes the rituals established *between* individuals in face-to face encounters in abovementioned mundane activities, as well as the importance of conventions that guide and structure people's talk and behaviour. It is interesting to note that both authors refer to an 'order', implying thus that there is some sort of orderliness beneath their objects of study which can be revealed.

Goffman sets himself the aim of identifying the rules that govern and structure everyday interaction. One of his key arguments is that the physical co-presence of another person profoundly informs the ways in which a person acts: the Other is both a spectator and a co-actor of the social scene, a part of the audience and yet a participant that watches and intervenes (Goffman, 1959). For the present study it is necessary to grasp the notion of interactional order more broadly. At first sight one can hardly observe any immediate, long-lasting face-to-face interaction between gym participants (a common exception is the interactions between members and staff). Indeed, most users seem to be engrossed in their own activities. Nonetheless the gym is a social situation, a place where people gather, occupying the same space and spending time in the co-presence of others. The interaction between them may not always be focused when those involved "openly cooperate to sustain a single focus of attention" (Goffman, 1963, p. 24) but can also – as for most of the time in gyms be

unfocused when those who come together in a social situation are primarily engaged in their own activities. What characterise so-called 'social situations' for Goffman are "mutual monitoring possibilities" (1963, p.18).

Social interaction is conceptualized by Goffman as staged (see also the terms Goffman uses: roles, discrepant roles, performances, front and back regions, communication out of character, the art of impression management, décor, audience etc.) As Jenkins (2008) points out, the interactional order is not free-floating; on the contrary, it is staged and embodied, territorial and necessarily grounded in the relations between objects and subjects in a three-dimensional space. Hence, Goffman provides a dramaturgical vocabulary that is strongly performative, spatial and material. Actors establish their roles through different channels, Goffman argues, namely through expressive messages 'given' and messages 'given off'. The content of a talk, or the information communicated is an expression given whereas gestures, postures, facial expressions, the tone of the speaker etc. are examples of expressions given off. Expressions are usually intended and those given off are typically unintentional, but equally meaningful. In the various stages of a gym, where the body is at the centre of all objectives, one may assume that all movements are more or less purposeful and directed towards a certain end. However, it will be interesting to observe if facial expressions and gestures, mutual looks between people and interactions with the present other in short and episodic encounters reveal more than what the actors have originally intended to communicate.

Another aspect of the gym to look at with Goffman is concerned with the routines of occupying and using space. They may vary among different types of gyms and even among individual gym users or staff members, and yet one can expect a common *script* of concrete actions, some kind of coherence and pattern that is advanced by architectural and organizational principles as well as by interpersonal contacts. The presentation of the self via roles is surely a collective affair, something one performs in social gatherings or 'teams', as Goffman calls them. Trainers in gyms for instance are more than just sport consultants, they do treat clients in a particular way so that

they feel comfortable and welcomed, often they want to be motivated, they want to be taken care of etc. There is a certain unwritten and yet recognized script that is acted out both by the staff and the customer. The term 'script' should not be mistaken for a formal code of behaviour or talk rather it is very much related to what was discussed above as the frame, the "principles of organization which govern events – at least social ones – and our subjective involvement in them" (Goffman, 1974, p.10). For the study of fitness sites it is worth detecting these principal scripts and analysing them as indicators of certain discursive practices.

A short comment needs here to be made relating to what seems to be a conceptual similarity between Butler's (1990) 'performativity' and Goffman's 'performances'. For Butler, performativity is "the *discursive* mode by which ontological effects are installed" (Butler, 1996, p. 112, emphasis added) whilst for Goffman, performances are presentations of the self; attempts to create specific impressions, mainly for others. Both authors imply that performances are constitutive of subjectivities and that the self is never prior to the social (Brickell, 2005). However, what distinguishes Butler profoundly from Goffman is, that she does not make a distinction between the performer and the performed, or, between a facade and the, ontologically speaking, 'original' subject:

> Performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms.... This repetition is not performed *by* a subject: this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. (Butler 1993, p. 95, emphasis in original)

The claim here is that it is the ritualized, reiterated act that produces, brings into being, what it seems to portray. As Butler argues in reference to gender identities, "gender is always a doing, though not a doing by the subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed" (Butler, 1990, p.25). Goffman does not necessarily contradict Butler when he writes that:

> A status, a position, a social place is not a material thing to be possessed and then

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displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished, and well-articulated. Performed with ease or clumsiness, awareness or not, guile or good faith, it is none the less something that must be enacted and portrayed, something that must be realized. (Goffman, 1959, p. 75)

Although Goffman points out here that performances may follow a script that lies outside people's awareness, he seems to assume an active, prior, conscious, and performing self in his analyses of social interaction. As Gregson and Rose (2000) critically remark, despite fundamental differences in the ways in which Goffman and Butler theorize performance, most notably, in reference to their contrasting understandings of agency, subjectivity, and power, the two authors can and should be thought together:

> …we want to argue, along with Butler, that thinking about social practices through performativity is categorically not reducible to thinking about them in terms of Goffmanesque performance. Rather, for us, performance - what individual subjects do, say, 'act out' - is subsumed within, and must always be connected to, performativity, to the citational practices which reproduce and subvert discourse, and which at the same time enable and discipline subjects and their performances. (Gregson & Rose, 2000, p. 441)

As pinpointed earlier, perhaps performativity and performances must best be understood as located on two different ontological levels. The former draws attention to how subjects are involved in the constitution of the discursive field and the latter points to the local mundane practices that take place and are made possible by the first.

Interpretative frames

Along these lines, Goffman is also intrigued by the dimension of personal involvement and subjective experience that he addresses on several occasions. In fact, the title of his book *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience* explicitly addresses the concern for the experiential. Here, Goffman argues that the extent and quality of experience is always implied in the organizing *frame* of a given

social scene and reinforced through the practical involvement of its actors (1974, 1961). A frame is here understood as a "schemata of interpretation" that "allows its user to locate, perceive, identify, and label" (Goffman, 1974, p. 21) an on-going social activity. Goffman's attempt to systematize the study of social life becomes evident here again: According to the author there are three types of frame: the 'primary frame' and two 'transformations' or 'reworkings' of it which are called the 'key' and the 'fabrication'. The primary frame, or the primary reading of a scene, renders a social situation meaningful. Through acknowledging the primary frame actors get to know how to be involved, that is to say, how to act and not to act and, taking this argument a bit further, what to think and not think. However, this initial interpretive scheme is not fixed and may be transformed into something else, either through 'keying' in which all participants are aware that the activity is transformed or through 'fabrication' in which people hold a false belief about the activity they are engaged in, that is, where there is a lack of awareness of the transformation. To give an example of what is meant by 'keying', screens placed in spinning studios which show moving images of computer generated landscapes (mountains, lakes etc.) give the illusion that one 'really' rides a bike outdoors. Without question, images of the 'real world' are intended to transform the experience of gym participants in certain ways whereas everyone in the room is aware of that effect. It should be noted that frames are not genuinely created by individuals but something individuals discover and arrive at:

> these frameworks are not merely a matter of mind but correspond in some sense to the way in which an aspect of the activity itself is organized … Organizational premises are involved, and these are something cognition somehow arrives at, not something cognition creates or generates. Given their understanding of what it is that is going on, individuals fit their actions to this understanding and ordinarily find that the ongoing world supports this fitting. These organizational premises – sustained both in the mind and in activity – I call the frame of the activity. (Goffman, 1974, p. 247)

As Smith (2006) notes, Goffman shifts his analytical focus towards the individual's

experience and away from the interactional order. Frameworks are described as "guided doings", which "incorporate the will, aim, and controlling effort of intelligence" (Goffman, 1974, p. 21). This, even personal will and desire do not seem to escape the organizational frame. One interesting facet in this research will be to look for written and unwritten, told and untold 'guided doings' in the fitness locale and how these inform what one *should do* and what one *desires* as a fitness participant.

The production of attachment and commitment

Attachment and commitment to an organizational setting are two further key elements which are, according to Goffman, not inherent individual traits but fragile states that have to be held together by institutional structures and rituals. Attachment and commitment – notions that sound like psychological mechanisms or modes of relating at first sight – are actually grounded in material practices: an establishment such as the gym might determine the categories its members are supposed to inhabit but these categories can never be stable and members can distance themselves from them, so that both mutual commitment must be reassured through explicit, repetitive rituals. It is worth citing Goffman at length here:

> … part of the individual's obligation is to be *visibly* engaged at appropriate times in the activity of the organization, which entails a mobilization of attention and muscular effort, a bending of oneself to the activity at hand. This obligatory engrossment in the activity of the organization tends to be taken as a symbol both of one's commitment and one's attachment, and behind this, of one's acceptance of the implications of participation for a definition of one's nature. (Goffman, 1991, p.162, emphasis in original)

What Goffman stresses here is that people feel obliged to act in certain ways to demonstrate their commitment to an identity-category. Commitment thus comprises the role's obligations and responsibilities that are reflected in actions. Goffman suggests that people are attached to a role if they are "affectively and cognitively enamoured" of it and "desiring and expecting to see [ourselves] in terms of the enactment of the role and the self-identification emerging from this enactment"

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(Goffman, 1961 p.89). It is tempting to extend this argument in two-fold way. Firstly, one may reverse Goffman's argument and suggest that demonstrations of commitment (e.g. wearing fashionable gym gear, attending advanced classes, eating protein bars) may themselves produce attachment both to the gym as an institution and the gym-goer identity. Thus, the sense of being a certain type of person does not precede the actions that are associated with it but are its consequences. Secondly, one may suggest that not only is the sense of self shaped by normative and regulative practices but also the very affects that accompany this sense. On a broader level, one can suggest that affects are, if not structured, certainly facilitated by the organizing frames of social space: shame, anxiety, guilt, joy and pride, for example, can be 'built' into the framework of an institution (Thrift, 2004). Goffman's remark that embarrassment, is "located not in the individual but in the social system" (1967, p. 108) substantiates this argument. Subjects feel embarrassed, he explains, when the assumptions they project about themselves are being threatened or discredited by the "expressive facts" of the situation (Goffman, 1967, pp. 107-108).

One could say that certain affects may even be required for the functioning of some sites as the promotion of physical display and the repetitive gesture as a signifier of commitment and attachment may not always be sufficient to guarantee loyalty. To give a brief example, one way affects are transmitted is through the 'impression management' of gym staff. Trainers, receptionists, and even cleaners, who are constantly subject to the gaze of gym users, are required to display a certain emotional state (e.g. by appearing happy, motivated, carefree, charming etc.). The aim is to evoke certain feelings in their customers. A crucial question to be answered in this project is: through what means does the fitness space seek to reinforce individuals' attachment and commitment and to what extent is 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983) successfully accomplished?

3.6 Reinventive institutions

With her notion of the 'reinventive institution' (RI henceforth) Susie Scott (2011) takes Goffman's analyses further and argues that late modernity is characterized by a new organisational form in which participation is voluntary but the subject-effects are at least as strong as in total institutions. What those "institutions without walls" (Scott, 2011, p.3) have in common is that they seek to transform individuals on the level of subjectivity. Actually, their *raison d'être* is to transform, or to re-invent, the individual on the most profound level. Those institutions are characterized by members' active engagement with institutional discourses, self-regulation, a desire to undergo personal change, voluntarism, permeability, flattened hierarchies and a cohesive inmate culture with a relative lack of resistance, mutual surveillance and high degrees of interaction. Given that participants of RIs actively and willingly reproduce institutional discourses, one may consider the power through which identities are transformed as qualitatively different from the power operating in total institutions where changes of the self are somehow motivated from without, and not necessarily from within. Examples of RIs range from therapeutic clinics to spiritual retreats, academic hothouses, secret societies and virtual communities:

> Whereas traditional TI [total institutions, author's note] inmates were committed against their will, and new identities imposed upon them, now we find people choosing voluntarily to enter institutions, believing that they need to change, and that it is their responsibility to do so. (Scott, 2011, p. 2)

What can be emphasized here is that people seek out those institutions because they feel a responsibility towards changing and shaping their identities. Scott suggests that this moral imperative stems from the fact that we live in what Furedi (2004) calls a 'therapy culture', a culture that calls for constant introspection and self-engineering in order to obtain happiness and personal satisfaction. It may seem counter-intuitive to consider gym training as a form of therapy at first sight. However, if 'therapy' is understood to be a cure in a wider sense, that is, an attempt to repair what is damaged and to improve and to validate the self and its integrity, we might classify gym training as a form of 'body therapy' because self-improvement and transformation of

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the body are at the core of fitness work. As the results of this thesis will show, however, it is not only the body that is being transformed at the gym: perhaps more importantly, participants' sense of self is being transformed or re-invented, too.

Reinventing ourselves together

Scott's concept is additionally fruitful because she invites us to re-think Foucault's conceptualization of power as circulatory within a symbolic interactionist framework. This helps us to address the question of how the production of subjectivities in gyms is reinforced by and within the interactional order of institutional life. Scott argues that members of RIs actively look for out for other people's company because they consider it pivotal to their own success. Interaction, as Scott argues, works in RIs for it enables mutual surveillance:

> …wherein members gaze at each other and monitor their relative progress towards a shared role. This mutual surveillance implies a network of connections between inmates, who exercise an equally penetrating, ubiquitous gaze. (Scott, 2011, p.49)

In the following, I wish to present an example that indicates how crucial the notion of the interactional order is to the present study: spatially speaking, gyms are not one of a kind but are reproducible, for fitness equipment is easy to obtain and the spatial lay-out of a gym is more or less imitable. Indeed, membership fees paid over several years are likely to greatly exceed the cost of some of the most common gym machines. One may then ask why participants do not choose to create a mini-version of the gym in their homes but opt for a gym membership. One of the reasons why this might be the case is that gyms often display a distinctive spatial 'aura' and atmosphere. By using particular lights, colours, music etc. or by holding particular events (e.g. weight reduction challenges or marathon preparation classes), they convey a sense of 'happening'. One other possible explanation might be that the social interaction with trainers and other participants provided by the gym guarantees commitment as it reinforces mutual surveillance. Participants may feel that they do not only need intrinsic motivation to accomplish fitness training but also the gaze of the other to stay committed. Scott's notion of 'performative regulation' seeks to

capture this other-oriented feature of RIs where subjects constitute and enact themselves through constant interaction with fellow participants: "power in the RI is not only discursively constitutive but also *interactively productive* of identities" (Scott, 2011, p. 51, emphasis in original). The presence of other participants at the gym, and more precisely, their embodied preoccupation with exercise machines, contributes to a mutual understanding about the situation and one's role therein. The presence of others, in other words, confirms one's sense of self at the gym.

I would like to make a critical remark on Scott's theorization here. To state that it is the physical presence of others and the interactions between people that shape the ways in which gym participants understand themselves, misses out something crucial, namely the *relational* dynamics between people. As Roseneil and Ketokivi (2015) note, it is perhaps more precise to speak of subjectivities as emerging in the '*trans-actional*' rather than the interactional sphere. Drawing on Emirbayer's (1997 cited in Roseneil & Ketokivi) relational sociology, the authors argue that people "derive their meaning, significance and identity from the transaction... [and] undergo a transformation that does not leave them the same" (Roseneil & Ketokivi, 2015, p. 6). In this vein, the gym may also be a transformative and liminal experience due to the novel encounters one makes there and due to the novel ways of relating, both to others and to the self. As Roseneil and Ketokivi put it, an individual

> gains its identity and becomes 'what' it is in relation to surrounding persons, places, meanings and events. Hence, rather than being pre-given bounded entities, they [individuals] are in a state of becoming within a wider set of relational processes Roseneil & Ketokivi, 2015, p. 7)

Scott's emphasis of the interactive production of identities can therefore be extended to the relational and transactional realm. Such a relational approach to the study of social spaces is very much in line with a psychosocial approach, that thinks together the "intrapsychic and the interpersonal, the psychic and the social" as they are "entangled in personal relationships" (Roseneil & Ketokivi, 2015, p. 12). Indeed, an analytic focus on relationality is neither given by Foucault, nor by Goffman, Turner,

or Bourdieu. Hence, the scope of these literatures must be widened to deepen our understanding how the subject-effects of gym operate on a transactional level and how actual relationships affect people's sense of self.

Progress through discipline

Most of the institutions Foucault and Goffman take issue with seek to cure and to improve individuals through (self-) disciplinary mechanisms. The capillary-like network of power with its normalizing function (Foucault, 1995) operating in prisons, hospitals or schools can be found in RIs as well. When Scott discusses RIs that are concerned with physical appearance, beauty, fashion and 'healthiness', she writes that:

> They may be institutional sites that facilitate the pursuits of these goals, such as fitness gyms, beauty clinics and spa resorts, or more amorphous collections of ideas, values and activities, such as the discourses and practise of dieting, which consume an actor's consciousness throughout the day. These RIs occupy a unique position on the boundary between work and leisure, for although they involve ostensibly relaxing, even self-indulgent activities, pursed on one's spare time, they simultaneously aim to bring the body into line with culturally normative standards as grips of perception (Scott, 2011, p. 107).

Discipline and goal-orientedness is a pivotal element in organisations when the idea of 'success' or progress is being emphasized. Progress can refer here to any category such as the physical, mental or psychological. To record and assess success, institutions draw on systems of archive and documentation. Crucially, as Scott argues, members of RIs often create their own archives. In gyms, for example, each individual owns a paper-based or digital personal file. This file contains information regarding the member's height, weight, fitness goals, exercise schedule and in some cases the person's medical history. Participants are told to document each of their gym sessions, that is, to write down which equipment they used, how many sets they accomplished and what weight they pressed. The idea is to successively increase one's physical abilities. The 'fitness diary' not only motivates the idea of progress but it also invites self-reflection and self-evaluation as part of this process. What the

diary-technique also does is to ignite the desire to come to 'completeness'. Indeed, RIs

> offer a different way of rethinking and transforming an incomplete self, and discursively produces different subjectivities (…) Individuals are encouraged to regard their fate as lying in their own hands, accept responsibility for their mistakes and free themselves from their shackles of deviant or unhealthy behaviour…Taking control of one's own correction is viewed not as a punishment but as a privilege, a positive opportunity to boost self-esteem. (Scott, 2011. p. 98)

As one can speculate, members undergo re-inventive regimes not only because they regard it as a positive opportunity to boost self-esteem but also partly because they believe they have a moral responsibility to be healthy or to feel better. In the context of the gym, one may then ask what participants hope to gain through the correction of their bodies and the advancement of their fitness levels, and relatedly, in which ways they feel incomplete or insufficient if they fail to do so.

Creating a version of the self

Institutional practices and their underlying assumptions about what is valuable or desirable enable subjects to create narratives around questions such as "What kind of person am I?" or "What do I value in life?". In short, they provide an opportunity for individuals to understand themselves in certain ways, and to reject others. Institutional belongings also give their members the opportunity to *present* themselves to others in certain ways, that is, to perform their identities in front of others. The statement "I am a gym member" may then imply a whole set of other unsaid assumptions about the uttering subject such as that the person values physical competence, that he or she is disciplined, dedicated, hard-working, and depending on the club membership, possibly affluent etc. In this respect, gym membership can be said to be a marker of social background and personality. Hence, in this study, I will address the question of to what extent the gym functions as an active and reiterative attempt to cultivate, express and affirm one's sense of self. How, in other words, might a gym membership be a part of a wider identity performance where, as an indicator of a certain way of life and/or social background and an index of character?

3.7 Conclusion

Despite different epistemologies, ontologies and analytical strategies, the various concepts on space that I have presented throughout this chapter can be used as a 'tool-box' as they have all something to offer for the present study. As it has become evident, the authors discussed share a common analytic sensibility towards space and the social and embodied practices herein. The construction and experience of the self is situated in and emerges from concrete sociospatial settings: it is through the material environment and peoples social interactions that subjects come into being. Turner's liminality concept, Foucault's notion of heterotopia, Goffman's and Scott's ideas on institutional life are used in this study as theoretical resources that help us to understand how subjectivities enfold in fitness locales. My aim is not to qualify the gym as a liminal space, a heterotopia, a total or re-inventive institution but to 'translate' these concepts into analytical vocabularies, with the purpose of understanding the dynamics of the gym in discursive terms, and to study the subjectifying power of discourse herein. Hence I want to transform the theories outlined in this chapter to *ways of looking at data*. What falls short in these accounts is a sensibility towards the affective and relational dimensions of space. Nonetheless, I will deal with the relational processes that people are engaged in at the gym. I will also pay analytical attention to people's affects and subjective experiences. In order to accomplish this, I opted for a multi-layered discourse analysis of the fitness space, that is, a methodology that allows us to study the discursive in psychosocial terms.

4

*Methodology:
a multi-layered analysis of the gym*

Building upon the ideas introduced in the preceding chapters, this chapter lays out the analytical strategies employed in this research project. To understand how materially and spatially situated, relational and affective practices in gyms can function as discursive resources and, as such, inform participants' subjectivities I draw on an eclectic use of analytic concepts and terminologies here. As noted previously, most forms of critical discourse analysis focus on language to extrapolate the historic and societal conditions of possibility that led to a particular set of discourses. In contrast, I want to suggest that a psychosocially informed analysis of the gym's subject-effects would attempt to ask how subjects' sense of self, their embodied experiences and affects are informed by the discourses that are perpetuated in and through a given social and spatial environment. This calls for a discourse analysis that is sensitive to space, materiality, embodied performances and inter- and transactions on the one hand, and to people's subjective experiences and affects on the other. I have suggested in the preceding chapter that the concepts of liminal space, heterotopia, total institutions, and re-inventive institutions can be used as theoretical resources that contribute to such an attempt but that their analytic scope must also be widened.

The current chapter is structured as follows: after reiterating the central research questions, I provide the rationale for the research techniques I used and the data sets I analysed. For each data set I explain what kind of material I gathered and describe the practical steps that were involved in data collection and analysis. Lastly, I outline the ethical issues which surrounded data collection, reflect on my own position as a researcher in this process and identify possible limitations of this research.

4.1 Research questions

To understand how fitness gyms provide their members with discursive resources and inform their subjectivities I formulated the following research questions:

(1) What discourses – understood as certain ways of knowing, experiencing and relating to the body and the self – are generated in and through the spatial, material and social practices of the gym?

(2) How do these sociospatially and materially anchored discourses unfold within the subjective experience of gym attendees? How does discourse enfold in relational practices and imbue subjectivities and yield affective responses?

In accordance with the theories presented in the preceding chapters I also formulated the following set of questions prior to data collection:

- *Functionality of gyms*: What is the socially and culturally constructed *raison d'être* of the gym?

- *Sense of self generated at the gym*: What kind of self and life is promised, anticipated and hoped for? Does the gym set in motion a transformative experience?

- *The gym in relation to other spaces*: How does this space relate to other spaces in society? How is it similar or different to other institutions with different organizing principles?

- *Juxtapositions and contradictions*: Which different principles does it juxtapose at the same time? What contradictions and conflict-laden relationships can be observed?

- *Entryways*: How do people get in and get out of the site? How are the entries and exits regulated? Are they permeable or closed? Who is excluding whom?

- *Temporality*: How is time perceived? Does the site abolish, neutralize, preserve or 'displace' temporality?

- *Codes of conduct*: Which rituals and codes of conduct have to be mastered in order to be a 'normal gym user'? What is the behavioural etiquette or the moral code? Which forms of relating to one other are allowed for and which are not?

- *Bodily stylizations:* Are there different corporeal styles in different places and how are they enacted (e.g. dress codes, consumer products, bodily qualities such as the silhouette)? What are the particular ways of doing an exercise, behaving in the changing rooms etc.? What constitutes a typical facial expression, noise or movement?

- *Material practices*: How are machines handled, or 'performed,' differently? What are the gestures and postures on different machines and in different sub-spaces of the gym?

- *Décor and accessories*: Which food, drink, clothing, magazines etc. are promoted and consumed by participants? What principles and logics are inherent to the goods one can consume? How is the place ordered spatially? Which objects with which functions are to be found here?

- *Relationalities*: What kind of verbal and non-verbal interactions can be observed? Who is interacting with whom and with what purpose? Do participants look at each other/do they observe other people's actions? How is the 'relational code' during exercise?

As stated above, this set of sub-questions stems from my engagement with the literature, most notably with the concepts of liminality, heterotopia, total and re-inventive institutions. These questions were constructed to sharpen my analytic lenses both in the field when I acted as a participant observer and during the interviews with gym goers as well as during the analysis of the data.

In order to address these questions I have opted for a three-fold research strategy: (a) To understand more of gym members' lived and embodied experience I studied their behaviour *in situ* and thus conducted participant observation in the field. (b) I conducted 29 individual, semi-structured interviews with regular gym goers and inquired about their exercise habits and gym experiences and 3 interviews with personal trainers. (c) I analysed online blogs and extracted themes and topics that gym goers discuss there. To deepen my understanding of personal training, I also analysed publicly available handbooks and online resources. Each of these techniques will be discussed in turn.

Methodological pluralism

As outlined above, a combination of methods is used in this study. Methodological pluralism, that is, the integrated use of different methods in a research project, aims for an "elaboration, enhancement, illustration, clarification of the results from one method with the results from another" (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989, p.259). Different methodologies can be complimentary in the sense that "one method may be offset by the strengths of another" (Madill and Gough, 2008, p.262). For example, whilst individual interviews and online blogs are valuable in helping to unpack the discourses participants take up when they describe their experiences at the gym, they tend to provide limited insights as to how these discourses are reflected in people's actual engagement with their material environment at the gym. To give another example, autoethnographic fieldnotes help us to reflect on affective responses that gym practices may engender, whilst advertisements are valuable in detecting the discourses that accompany these experiences. Hence, the aim of using a variety of data sets in this study is to shed light on my research questions from a variety of perspectives and to gain a more multi-faceted and multi-levelled understanding of the object of study.

Methodological pluralism, or a "transmethodological approach" (Lazard, Capdevila & Roberts 2011, p.149), is also seen to contribute to good practice in qualitative research. From social constructionist perspective, it is clear that multiple methods are not used in this study to get closer to the 'truth', that is, to obtain more reliable and valid outcomes that can be generalized and predicted[1]. Instead, plural methods are used to obtain "multiple ways of seeing and hearing"

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[1] There is a vivid and polyvocal debate on the criteria for evaluating qualitative research with different authors suggesting different criteria for methodological rigour (see Parker, 2004 for an overview and discussion). Often, the basic premise is that in contrast to quantitative studies, the quality of qualitative inquiries cannot be evaluated on the grounds of objectivity, validity, reliability and generalizability but should instead be evaluated in terms of plausibility and credibility. To meet these criteria, Cresswell (1998), for example, suggests various strategies: a prolonged engagement with the data, thick description, external audits and peer reviewing, methodological reflexivity and methodological pluralism. Parker (2004) extends these strategies by suggesting that a positioning of results in relation to existing literature also enhances the quality of qualitative studies.

the object of study (Greene, 2007, p.20). It is expected that results stemming from one type of data collection will overlap with results from another data set. However, as we will see in the analysis chapters to come, at times they may also be contradictory. Handbooks on personal training, for example, do not always mirror the actual practices and sentiments of personal trainers. Rather than regarding this as a sign of poor validity or 'inaccuracy' of results, it can be assumed that there is tension and contradiction in the object of study itself. Hence, the different analytical observations and results *interact* with each other and ultimately yield a richer account of the gym experience which is one of the reasons for why each data set is not presented in a separate chapter (see Chamberlain et al. 2011).

4.2 Participant observation

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault contends that in order to unpack discursive techniques and the micro-physics of power, one must pay great attention to detail, to "meticulous, often minute, [discursive] techniques" that may look like "subtle arrangements, apparently innocent, but [are] profoundly suspicious (Foucault, 1995, p.139). In order to understand how spatiality and temporality are inscribed into the materiality of the fitness site, I opted for multi-sited participant observation as a research strategy. Participant-observation helps to draw a portrait of a particular culture or social group by actively engaging with its local practices, routines, interactions and habituated actions. This 'culture' can be a group of people living in a particular part of the world but also social or institutional settings within a specific society, such as the modern-day fitness club (Fetterman, 1998). Whilst people's individual accounts, for example, in interviews, give great insight into personal fitness regimes they often offer less rich descriptions of ordinary material practices and behaviours in the real-life situation. One can assume that concrete actions and routinized behaviour in the gym are so familiar to regular gym users that they either do not consider them to be relevant or find them difficult to verbalize explicitly during the interview. As Karen O' Reily explains:

> Ethnographic research is a special methodology that suggests we learn about people's lives from their own perspective and from within the context of their lived experience. This involves not only talking to them and asking questions but also

learning from them by observing them, participating in their lives, and asking questions that relate to the daily life experience as we have seen and experienced it. (O' Reilly, 2005, p. 84)

Thus, I have spent between four to six hours a week in gyms, participating in exercise and observing my environment. As a covert researcher my status as researcher has remained unrevealed during my fieldwork. I spent an extended period of time in particular settings and concealed the fact that I was not only exercising but also conducting a study (see below for ethical considerations). Participant observation in a setting in which body-work is at the forefront requires further thinking about the researcher's body and her visceral responses. Here, Wacquant's ideas on 'carnal ethnography' proved themselves to be helpful: as I have outlined in Chapter 1, Wacquant (2005, 2014) argues that as subjects, we are all embodied, that is to say, we are all beings of blood and flesh who relate to the world in libidinal and passionate ways. Rather than omitting these embodied and affective responses as 'interfering waves', ethnographers should recognize and take full epistemic advantage of the visceral nature of themselves and social life, respectively. In this vein, I have taken my own affects and bodily reactions into account and treated them as a form of data worth analysing. By allowing embodied and affective experience to inform my analysis and therefore allowing myself to be 'enmeshed' in discursive practices, I also extend the conventional domain of discourse analysis, and thus, transform it to a psychosocially informed mode of inquiry.

Selection of sites

A typology of London's gyms can be made with regard to many variables such as the size of the club, membership fees, location, target group, services and activities. After having visited various fitness clubs in London, it seemed to me that conceptual, or 'atmospheric', differences between clubs bring about the highest variability in terms of material practices employed there. I chose to exclude non-commercial fitness centres from my study (e.g. gyms provided by community centres or university gyms) for the following reasons: although non-profit gyms often offer similar services and amenities my perception was that campus or local authority/council gyms have different agendas than commercial sites. They seem to be less oriented towards consumerism and aesthetics but more

focussed on issues around health, sociability and possibly on the idea of citizenship too – issues that would have required a slightly different theoretical approach than the one I wanted to motivate in this study. Thus, I engaged in participant observation at the following three commercial sites over the course of two years:

L.A. Fitness is a UK-wide chain with middle-range membership fees (£40-£60 per month) and 24 clubs in London providing standardized facilities. Located in zones 1 to 3, the clubs are either in residential neighbourhoods or in business districts, and they tend to be busiest during lunch breaks or after work hours. With my 12-months Premium Membership, which lasted from February 2011 until January 2012, I could visit all LA Fitness clubs in London but mainly visited the ones in Golders Green and Highgate as these were the ones close to my home. Both areas can be said to be prosperous, with mostly middle and upper-middle class white population. Golders Green has a big orthodox Jewish community which may partly explain why the gym there has a women-only exercise room. I perceived the clientele in Golders Green as older than the one in Highgate which has a substantial proportion of members in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties (These are obviously my own estimates based on my observations in the field).

The Park is an exclusive, luxurious and independently owned health club in South West London (Chiswick) with distinctive architectural and technological features. The club promotes itself as the biggest and most spacious gym in London and emphasises family activities, indoor and outdoor exercising, personal training and social events. With an average membership fee of £140 a month, The Park is one of the more expensive gyms in the city and offers next to gym exercise a wide array of services such as a beautician, physiotherapist, a crèche, two restaurants, one bar, free newspapers and magazines, three computers with free internet access, indoor and outdoor pools, a Jacuzzi and several saunas. The clientele at The Park ranges in age from teenagers (who are only allowed to use the facilities at certain hours of the day) to senior citizens. It is a predominantly white population, both members and staff. Here, my membership lasted from

January until March 2012. The time frame was limited mainly due to financial reasons.

PureGym is a low-budget gym with membership fees ranging from £15-27 a month whereas gym memberships are contract-free. PureGym is a UK-wide chain with currently 72 sites of which 8 are located in London and three more sites opening soon in the city. During my research I trained at the site in Holloway Road. I chose this locale as it has a great diversity in ethnicity, age, body types, and levels of physical fitness. The majority of the staff members are non-white. In comparison to the other two sites, the range of services is rather basic. There is no reception desk, no snack bar (but a vending machine), no towels or saunas. My membership lasted here 10 months, from August 2012 to April 2013.

It is important to note that this is not a comparative study; I did not compare and contrast the three gyms listed above in any systematic way. The three locales can be regarded as theoretical or *instrumental* cases which are particularly relevant for the material/spatial conceptualization of discourse (Stake, 2003). The employment of case studies, as Yin (2003) points out, is particularly useful when one aims to explore the way an environment functions and operates: the 'how,' rather than the 'what' or the 'why,' of the setting. The notion of the theoretical case alludes to the fact that the case is not necessarily a typical or exemplary instance of the object of study but rather a theoretically relevant one. Hence its deployment does not claim generalizability of results but gives insights into how well the theory can be applied and by which methodological strategies it can fruitfully be approached.

Data collection

During the participation observation I spent 2-4 days a week (approximately 4- 10 hours a week) in each of the gyms and took part in a range of activities. I conducted covert participant observation of the gym floor, group exercise classes, and the cafeteria. During my fieldwork I wore a typical gym outfit (shirt, sweatpants and trainers) and had typical gym 'accessories' (a training towel, a drink bottle and an MP3 player). I walked around the gym, trained on the machines, took part in group exercise classes and had conversations both with the members of staff and other trainees. In contrast to the semi-structured interviews I

conducted, these conversations were unstructured. I recorded my field notes in notebooks both while working out and immediately after visiting a facility. When I was on the gym floor I made bullet points in my small pocketbook and wrote more extensively after the training session. As recording one's exercise routines is not an unusual practice at the gym, my note taking did not attract any attention. In choreographed classes, note taking was not possible and I tried to remember relevant aspects that I expanded upon afterwards. I kept a separate notebook for each fitness club and made notes on population size and demographics at any given time, the spatial layout, the ambience and atmosphere as I perceived it (music, cleanliness, colours, the general "mood"), conversations among members as well as conversations between members and staff. Whilst broadly guided by the analytical questions elaborated in the previous chapter, my field notes contained descriptions of my personal experiences and social encounters while exercising in different parts of the gym and the material practices I am involved in. My field notes also featured personal reflections on my body and work-out practices. In order to have a better understanding of the working principles of materiality in the gym, I drew maps of the different areas and/or photographed them; I observed how people occupied these particular places in terms of what they typically did, how they engaged with certain machines and how they interacted with each other and presented themselves etc. At the end of my field work at a facility, I transcribed my hand-written notes.

4.3 Interviews with fitness participants

Again, given that Foucauldian scholars are typically not interested in individuals' thoughts, representations or beliefs, interviewing may at first glance seem to be a counter-intuitive choice of method. Indeed, having Foucault's and Goffman's momentous studies in mind, I had also planned to forgo people's accounts at first. However, I decided to draw on interview material for two main reasons: First, I wanted to explore how particular ways of thinking, problematizing and feeling are circulated in gyms and permeate the experience of fitness participants (Hunt in Kendall & Wickam, 1995, p. 35). This was something I could not address with participant observation only for whilst it allowed me to think about my own experience it did not account for the experience of other gym goers. Especially

because I was not a newcomer to gym culture and because I had more or less established opinions on what goes on there, qualitative interviews were a necessary component of this research. Having said that, interviewing people about their routines and micro-practices helped me to think about how discourses unfold within subjects and how individual experience is structured through material and institutional practices. The second reason for adopting interviews had to do with the research questions I set myself prior to the data collection, questions that could not be fully answered by participant observation only. Interviews also helped me to take into account crucial practices, routines and interactions I might have missed as a participant observer.

Participants

I conducted 32 semi-structured interviews in total, 29 with regular gym members. I recruited 20 women and 9 men, ages 23 to 69 (see Appendix A for the list of interviewees). Additionally, I have interviewed 3 personal trainers, 2 of them were women and one man. As I wanted to remain incognito during my participant observation, none of my interviewees were from the gyms I have conducted my field research in. Respondents were recruited through a combination of personal contacts and snowball technique/referrals. The snowball technique itself has its limitations, self-selection being the most significant in the context of this project. Obviously, for the participants I recruited exercise in a gym was an important enough part of their lives that they volunteered and were interested to talk about fitness in general and their own fitness practices and histories in particular. The criteria for interviewees were minimal: 18 years old or over, English speaking, and current member of any gym. The criteria for personal trainers were respectively: 18 years or over, English speaking, current or former instructor or personal trainer at a gym. I chose to include personal trainers into my sample as I wanted to explore which discourses they employed in their daily work and to what extent those resonated in participants' accounts.

In contrast to what I have observed in the field, my interview sample was limited, consisting of predominantly white, middle-class individuals. There were only three people of colour amongst my interviewees. Two other participants had

identified themselves as gay (although I had not asked for their sexual orientation). One must assume that a different sample would certainly have yielded different results than the ones I present in this study. Given that subjectivities are always mediated through one's position in society, it can be assumed that class and ethnicity – but also gender, body size/shape, age, education – have an impact on respondents' experiences. These variables are likely to shape people's orientation towards exercise in general, and fitness gyms in particular (Bourdieu, 2001 [1984]). However, my analysis was not primarily concerned with examining those variables systematically, although whenever issues of gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation etc. became salient in my data, I have taken those into account. In Chapter 7, for example, I look at processes of corporeal identification with others, the spatial layout of the gym floor and the performances in changing rooms which cannot be understood without recourse to issues of gender. Chapter 8 is concerned with how material practices at the gym sustain ways of being that very much reflect social status and class.

Interview schedule

Initially an interview schedule was constructed in accordance with my research questions, my engagement with the literature on gyms and the theoretical concerns of the project. I used the same topic guide for both male and female participants and a separate one for fitness instructors. During interviewing, however, the topic guide served primarily as a checklist as I wanted to create an atmosphere in which a two-way conversation rather than a question-answer session occurred. After conducting three pilot interviews some questions and issues were narrowed or expanded while others were changed substantially or abandoned altogether.

Interview schedule for participants

(a) Introduction

- What is the name of your gym and how often do you go there in a typical week?

- Can you tell me about how you decided to join a gym?

- What motivates you to come to the gym? (***Probes if interviewee says something vague such as "for my health", "to get fitter" etc.: What do you mean by that? Can you say a bit more about that?***)

- Please describe your gym as if you were describing it to a person who has never seen the interior of a gym before.

(b) Main body: Now I am interested in what you specifically do when you are at the gym…

- Please describe a typical visit in your gym. How do you proceed once you have arrived?

- What body parts do you target with your training?

- Which machines do you use? Can you describe how you feel when you are exercising on this machine?

- How do you keep track of your exercises and any improvements (use of the scales or timetables)?

- How do you plan your gym days and how do you prepare yourself for them?

- Please describe how you feel on the way to the gym and just before you arrive? How do you feel afterwards on your way back home?

- What is a good or successful work-out for you?

- Do you feel differently about your body when you are at the gym compared to when you are in other places? How is it different? *(Probes if respondent has no answer: Do you feel more/less aware of/comfortable with/critical of/satisfied with your body in the gym? More or less exposed than in other places?)*

- What goes through your mind when you observe yourself in the mirror while you are exercising?

- What do you do at the gym that is not related to fitness as such? *(Probes: read, listen to music, talk to people, watch TV, daydream etc.)*

- Do you sometimes look at other people and watch how they exercise? What goes through your mind then?

- Do you think other people worry about how they look at the gym? How do you feel about that?

- What do you wear at the gym? *(Probes: How do you wear your hair? Do you use make-up, deodorant etc.?)*

- Have you have bought any fitness products? Why did you buy those?

- Do you sometimes speak to people when you are at the gym?

- Would you describe your gym as a place where people socialize? What kind of personal relationships do you have there?

- Have you ever spoke to gym staff?

- What have you learned about fitness, diet etc. from the members of staff?

- Have you ever worked out with a personal trainer? What is/was it like?

- Are there any areas/machines/people that you dislike at the gym?

- Were you to create your perfect gym, what would it look like and what kind of people would be there?

- Do you remember times in the past few years when it was difficult for you to stick to your schedule? Weeks or even months, perhaps, where you did not go to the gym regularly? What were the reasons?

(c) Outro

- Can you tell me why you enjoy exercise? What is it that you like about it? ***(Probe if participant says she/he does not like exercise: Can you tell me why you don't like it? what makes you go to the gym anyway?)***

- Do you know people who do not exercise at a gym (friends, family, colleagues etc.)? What do you think of that?

- Looking back to the time before you signed up to this gym, do you think anything has changed? Has the gym exercise affected your life in any way?

Interview schedule for trainers

(a) Introduction

- Where do you work at the moment? Who are your clients? How do you recruit them?
- How did you decide to become a fitness trainer?

- When clients book personal training sessions with you, what happens next? What is the procedure?

(b) Main Body: Now I am interested in the relationship between you and your clients…

- How many clients do you currently have and can you tell me a bit about each ***(Probes: What are their initial motivations, what is particular about this person? Do you know what they do for work, what hobbies they have, their private life etc.)***

- Do you have favourite clients as well? What makes them special?

- When you work out with a client, how do you know that you have done a good job?

- I would like to read out a quote from one my interviewees and I would like to know what your thoughts are: "I spend 2 hours a week with my personal trainer and I like every minute of it. I once said to somebody that other than my partner who I live with it is the second significant relationship in my life. And it's a joke but actually it is a sort of significant emotional relationship."

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- Can you produce a concrete memory of a client that you found difficult to work with?

- What are typical conversation topics during training?

- Do you think about your clients when you are not at the gym, your working site?

(c) Outro

- What do you like most about being a personal trainer?

- Are there any aspects that you do not like about your job or find hard to accomplish?

Interview process

After establishing initial contact, by phone or email, and setting up a date, time, and location I conducted interviews with respondents either in the cafeterias of the gyms or at a public place of the respondents' convenience. Each interviewee was provided with a consent form that explained the rationale of my study, a confirmation of confidentiality and contact information (see Appendix B). Each participant was interviewed once whereas the shortest interview lasted 24 minutes and the longest 110 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Encountering sensitive topics during interviews

Although I did not consider the 'gym experience' to be a highly sensitive topic arousing powerful emotions or causing distress, during interviews "it is possible for any topic, depending upon the context, to be a sensitive one" (Lee and Renzetti, 1990, p. 512). Questions asked during an interview may evoke feelings of sorrow, grief, anger, or despair and an interviewee might become too overwhelmed to continue or even to cry. When interviews are not highly structured, but instead interactive and conversational, one cannot entirely predict the course that an interview might take. Also, as Corbin and Morse (2003) write, "there will always be persons who have unresolved issues that haunt and torment them and persons who are emotionally fragile" (p. 338). Two particular topics that

I considered to be potentially delicate over the course of this research were participants' possibly ambivalent relationship to their bodies and affects related to shame or lack of self-worth.

To minimise stress during the interview process, I employed the following strategies. First, I gave as much control as possible to the participants. After introducing myself as a researcher in the pre-interview phase, I repeated the subject of my research project and gave an overview of the topics I was planning to address during the interview. I clearly stated that if there were questions and topics they were uncomfortable with, or that they simply did not want to address, then they were free to indicate this. I guaranteed that I would neither question nor comment on their decision. I also emphasised that interviewees were free to withdraw from the study at any time, without the need for an explanation. Second, I remained sensitive to participants' emotional state and I was prepared to intervene in case I sensed emotional stress (Brzuzy, Ault & Segal, 1997). As Kavanaugh and Ayres (1998) state, the interviewer's ability to evaluate and respond to the emotional state of the participant is crucial throughout the interviewing process. If I felt an interviewee was struggling, I would stop the interview and ask her/him whether it was appropriate to continue with the current topic, whether they wished me to change to another topic, or whether they wished for me to terminate the interview with the possibility of arranging a subsequent meeting at some later date. (I would intervene as follows: "This seems to be an uncomfortable/sensitive topic and I'd like to say that we do not have to talk about it if it causes too much distress for you".) I would then help the participant to regain composure by expressing empathy whilst remaining calm and receptive. Depending on the intensity of the distress, I would recommend that the interviewee call a friend or a family member, advising her/him not be alone in this state; to engage in a positive activity; or, if I sensed severe emotional difficulties, to consider counselling services in the near future.

4.4 Online blogs and handbooks about personal training

As another strategy of gathering information about people's practices at gyms I chose to study online blogs and publicly available handbooks. It should be mentioned that I have decided to gather this type of data only *after* the initial analyses of the observational and interview material. This means I only decided to

look at blogs and handbooks once I had already carried out and was still carrying out other research strategies and had my initial results. Hence, the material taken from blogs and handbooks is rather illustrative; it sheds more light on my other findings.

The benefits of online data collection have been summarized by Hookway (2008) as follows: blogs provide a publicly available, low-cost and instantaneous technique for collecting substantial amounts of data; they are naturalistic data in textual form, making tape recordings and transcriptions redundant; the anonymity of the online context means that bloggers may be relatively unselfconscious about what they write; blogs enable access to populations otherwise geographically or socially removed from the researcher. The anonymity of web-based social interaction seemed indeed to offer a different angle on the world of fitness where personal accounts appear to be more direct, open and 'confessional'. Blogs can be found on gym motivation, rules of conduct in locker rooms and showers, embarrassing moments during training or what (not) to wear at the gym. Hence I accomplished a basic, selective search through two widely known search engines for blogs (www.blogster.com and www.blogger.com) and looked for the themes that I had identified before (e.g. "what to wear at the gym", "gym locker room", "gym locker room" etc.). These are revealing issues that interviewees seemed uncomfortable with addressing in the interview situation. This proved a source of invaluable information that I may not have come by otherwise.

As personal training session were rather costly at the three gyms that I conducted my research in (£40-80 an hour) and could only be purchased in packages of eight to ten sessions, I was not able to do participant observation in this field. Here, the analysis of handbooks proved to be helpful. Most handbooks are written as guide or advice books for fitness staff pursuing a career as personal trainers. The books I mainly draw on in this research are: *Personal training: theory and practice* (J. Crossley, 2013), *The business of personal training* (Roberts, 1996), *Becoming a personal trainer* (St. Michael & Formichelli, 2004) and *It's more than making them sweat. A career training guide for personal fitness trainers* (Thorton, 2001).

4.5 Data analysis

Though my analysis focuses on spatial and material practices, the data I have collected and analysed was not only observational but also necessarily textual and visual for my observations needed to be 'translated' into a format. I had three sets of data: the field notes including my written accounts and photographs, the interview transcripts and the blog entries. In each data set, I identified themes and topics that I considered to be relevant in terms of my research questions, as well as in terms of issues addressed by the theoretical framework and the literature on gyms. Hence the analytic procedure was driven by my theoretical and analytic interests. As a consequence, in my analysis chapters I do not present a thick description but a more detailed analysis of some aspect of the data. As a first step of the analytic procedure I have undertaken a line-by-line analysis of each primary document and thus established a list of themes such as "interactions with other participants'", "motivation for gym membership", "gym routine", "gym atmosphere", "embodied experience" etc. This list entailed 46 categories in total. I then revised this list, merging these categories into broader themes around which the following empirical chapters are organized. The analysis involved a comparative approach whereas I looked for coherence and contradictions both across and within the locales and the data sets. Hence, besides patterns and recurring topics, I was also interested in what may be perceived as 'inconsistent' or surprising elements. Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously and systematically which required a constant moving back and forward between and across data sets. Writing was an integral part of analysis and not something that I accomplished at the end.

4.6 Possible limitations

As Van Maanen (1988) claims, theory has the most relevance during the analysis and writing phase where the researcher selects what he or she wants to present to the reader. The same data can be interpreted from various angles, depending on which conceptual tools the researcher uses. Hence, my concern with the subject-effects of gyms and the role of material practices herein certainly coloured my analysis. By the same token, the focus on spatiality in general, and my theoretical affinities with Foucault and Goffman in particular, shaped my view on the data.

As mentioned earlier, aspects of the gym that I did not study explicitly involved issues on gender, ethnicity, class and age as neither my research questions nor my analytic lenses in the field were sharpened according to these, certainly important, aspects. I am certain that an explicitly feminist, Marxist, psychoanalytic or post-colonial analytic framework would yield different results from mine, even of the very same data. Rather than regarding this as a deficit or limitation of my research, though, I would suggest that different frameworks simply provide different layers of analysis that can be considered as equally fruitful.

4.7 Ethical issues

My research followed the recommended ethical guidelines of the *Birkbeck School of Social Science, History and Philosophy Ethics Committee.* As mentioned above, all interviewees were afforded the right to anonymity and confidentiality. Whilst I provide participants' actual age and occupation throughout the thesis, every participant was given a pseudonym so that their responses cannot be matched to their personal details by anyone other than myself. The use of visual images from the field may have raised particular ethical concerns, especially as I have taken them in my role as a covert researcher. However, I decided to take photographs that do not depict any participants - no individuals appear on the pictures presented in this study.

A critical reflection needs to be made with regards to the ethics of covert participant observation and my bypassing of informed consent. In social sciences much research has been carried out covertly, intending to guarantee access to the field and to avoid affecting the behaviour of those being observed (McKenzie, 2009). Besides the fact that informed consent would have proven impractical if not unachievable in the context of the gym – which is essentially a semi-public setting with a large number of participants entering and leaving the place in a relatively short amount of time – I had two main reasons for adopting covert research methods. First, during my observations I was interested in participants' 'natural' routines and practices and outing myself as an observant may have produced artificiality. Secondly, although my identity as a researcher and knowledge of my work was kept from those who were being studied by me, I did not seek to deceive or manipulate my research participants. As Calvey (2008)

rightly points out, "researchers can effectively create or alter situations to catalyse certain types of behaviours or responses they are more interested in" (p. 913). I was very aware of the need not to manipulate a situation in order to gain 'better' data.

Ethics in online research

Conducting research in virtual settings raises some ethical issues that may be different from more 'traditional' ethical concerns (Brownlow and O'Dell, 2002). The main question seems to be whether conventional ethical guidelines for conducting research can be transferred to online contexts (Bowker & Tuffin, 2004; Sixsmith & Murray, 2001; Walther, 2002). One of the main questions is whether online material should be treated as a text produced by an *author* or by a *research participant* who gives a first-person account. In the context of this research project it is useful to differentiate between online blogs and online discussion forums first. Ethical issues on the use of online blogs have been addressed and controversially discussed by many scholars. I agree with Walther (2002), who claims that online forums that are publicly accessible can be treated as any other public space. "Blogging is a public act of writing for an implicit audience", as Hookway (2008, p.105) writes in a similar vein, "thus, blogs may be personal but they are not private. Respectively, researching their content can be regarded like research on television or newspaper content." Hence, for the analysis and dissemination of publicly available online blogs no ethical concerns were foreseen.

Whilst blogs are written to target a public audience and can therefore be treated as a text produced by an author (similar to handbooks, journal articles, advertisements and other online and offline texts that are intended to reach the general public), the analysis of online discussion forums raises different ethical issues. Roberts (2015) suggests several key ethical issues for conducting research in online discussion forums that were also considered in the present study. First, she suggests determining whether an online community can be treated as a public or a private space. Whilst it may be argued that online communities and websites that are not password protected can be treated as public spaces, online discussion forums that require registration must be treated as private. As Roberts (2015)

writes, "members of these communities often do not view them as public spaces, intend communication for a specific audience (typically other community members), and seldom envisage researchers as part of this intended audience." (p. 317-318). None of the online resources I draw upon in this research project are password protected which means that I had not to create an account in order to read and follow the discussions. Hence I consider all of them to be public spaces. However, analysing material and quoting from online discussion forums is similar to using material obtained from covert observation in public spaces because online participants neither know that they are being observed nor did they provide their informed consent to take part in this study. It is perhaps best to think of research in online communities as virtual ethnography, or as it is sometimes referred to, as 'netnography' (Kozinets, 2010). According to The British Psychological Society's (2007) *Guidelines for Ethical Practice in Psychological Research Online,* the name and address of the website or discussion forum should not be published and "the pseudonyms should be treated with the same ethical respect as a researcher would treat a person's real name" (p.6). Therefore, I anonymised both of the forums' and its users' names.

Roberts (2015) further argues that ethical concerns should be guided by the sensitivity of the topic. And indeed, as it will be shown in the analysis chapters, some topics are related to very intimate issues around the body, obviously causing stress and anxiety amongst participants. A related issue concerns the traceability of the users through search engines. As mentioned above, both the name of the website and usernames were anonymised. In the latter case a pseudonym of the pseudonym was used. However, in order to avoid identification of the users through search engines, and in order not to violate copyright standards, I have paraphrased the quotations (e.g. through rewriting and/or rearranging the words) and ensured that they were not traceable though the most prevalent search engine 'google' (Beaulieu & Estalella 2012; Malik and Coulson 2013).

4.8 Reflexivity

Reflexivity can be described as the "thoughtful, self-aware analysis of the intersubjective dynamics between researcher and the researched" (Finlay & Gough 2008, p. ix), in which 'the researched' may comprise all participants involved in the study as well as the object of the study as such (e.g. the gym):

> Reflexivity requires critical self-reflection of the ways in which researchers' social background, assumptions, positioning and behaviour impact on the research process. It demands acknowledgement of how researchers (co-)construct their research findings. (Finlay & Gough 2008, p.ix)

The psychosocially informed epistemological and ontological position I adopt in this research derives from a repudiation of thinking that the researcher and the phenomena under study can be separated. I reject the idea that there is an objective social reality 'out there' that can be accessed by an equally objective observer. In other words, I acknowledge my role as a researcher interpreting the data and find it crucial to reflect on my role in and impact on the findings I present. Reflexive practice was implemented into qualitative research exactly because of this awareness and acknowledgement of the situated-ness of any research process. Especially feminist scholars drew attention to the power dynamics that exist in all stages of research and in every research encounter, inevitably influencing process and outcome (Gough, 2008).

The ultimate aim of reflective practice is to enhance and deepen our understanding of the research topic. Entering this project, I was quite aware of how my own gym experiences, in combination with my academic training and interests, have shaped my views on contemporary fitness spaces and practices. My interest in studying the fitness club grew out of being a regular gym member of many years, and simultaneously, often feeling discomfort in that place. Hence, I have always been sceptical and self-conscious about my gym membership. This critical stance is certainly reflected in my theoretical affiliations and colours my data analysis and discussion in this study. In a way, then, this thesis was written from a first-person perspective, meaning that my subjectivity has itself formed an instrument and object of the research process, although this might not always be

reflected in my writing style. However, I take it for granted that both the objects and the producers of knowledge are never 'objective' or 'neutral' in a positivist sense, but always engaged, politically invested and prejudiced. Having adopted a discourse analytic framework that seeks to study how discourse unfolds itself within subjects, an engagement with the personal such as my biography, my age, gender, social status etc. may "risk being read as exactly the kind of discourse that it attempts to displace…it risks turning my life, my self, into a 'case'" (McWhorter, 1999, pp. xviii-xix). As an answer to such an argument, I would argue that my positioning as a middle-class, highly educated, heterosexually adapted person in her late twenties/early-thirties, white-ish, for most of her life slightly overweight woman, does have a strong impact on *my ways of seeing* the gym, (I can never stand outside these subject-categories; every aspect of my research is affected by them) but that, nonetheless, there are trans-individual thoughts and experiences that are produced and shaped by the discourses prevalent at the gym and that can be extracted from interviews with other participants.

4.9 Concluding remarks

As it became apparent in this chapter, the methodology I have employed is eclectic, multi-layered and purposive. By looking at instantiations of discourse within embodied practices and trans-actions on the one hand, and at talk and texts on the other, the ultimate goal is to explore how discourse unfolds in and imbues people's subjectivities. The next four chapters present the results of this analytic process. Chapter 5 shows how material practices employed at gyms are tied into discourses of effectiveness and productivity and, as a result, generate a range of affective responses amongst gym users. Chapter 6 engages with two particular encounters, or, transactions, between gym trainers and gym members and shows how the gym produces both individualizing and homogenizing subject-effects whilst establishing different ways of relating between trainers and trainees. Chapter 7 focuses interactions and performances employed at the gym and sheds light on the impact of 'other bodies' on people's sense of self and the affective responses that may arise as a consequence. Chapter 8 looks at how belonging to a gym helps to cultivate a particular type of subjectivity that harmonizes with neoliberal ideals of the self as self-reliant and constantly 'becoming'.

5

Training at the gym, training for life

In this chapter, I attempt to gain a deeper understanding of how members experience 'spatio-temporal intensities' during their training. I show that some participants consider their time at this space as an extension, or continuation, of their life tasks whilst others see the gym as a welcoming disruption of daily life. In the second part of this chapter I analyse the perceived effects of the gym on members' lives. Overall, I identify two discourses to which participants frequently refer to: first, there is a general sense that the gym turns its people into strong, efficient and productive beings; gym users report that the gym 'speeds up' their day and helps them to be more prepared for demanding situations in everyday life. Second, gym exercise is believed to lead to increased psychological well-being, helping participants to tackle emotionally difficult life situations more successfully. In order to illustrate how the materiality of the gym fosters these discourses the third part of the chapter focuses on some specific types of exercise. The two examples I discuss in more depth are the treadmill and the weight machine. Based on my own experience with these machines during field work, I argue that the specificities of the machines reinforce discourses of effectiveness and productivity. By dividing the body and its movements into exact units, allocating them a specific length of time and space, a gym regime suggests certain ways of knowing and acting upon the body. Often, the body is treated as an 'anatomical atlas' with localisable areas, each of them calling for a different intervention. At other times, it is targeted as a whole, and different parts are addressed at once in a minimal space. Surprisingly, these interventions upon the body do not prevent users from enjoying their training. On the contrary, exercise related micro-practices such as calorie counting or performance evaluation evoke feelings of mastery, pride and, ultimately, self-contentedness.

5.1 Spatio-temporal intensities at the gym

The manager of the Londoner upmarket health club Third Space states in a newspaper interview that their members have three spaces in their lives – "home, work and here" (Jeffries, 2004). The Third Space is almost self-contained, characterised through many sub-spaces that speak to clients' most essential needs (e.g. supermarket, laundry, medical centre). The majority of members train here either before or after work whilst some even come in only to take a shower before they go out for the night. Surely, Third Space is an exceptional case in a sense that most fitness clubs do not have such a wide array of services. Nonetheless, this case points towards a general trend that emerges from the data, namely the temporal and geographical embeddedness of gyms in the lives of their clients. How, we might ask, is the gym temporally and spatially related to, and yet different from the work place or home? How do exercisers fit in their fitness regime into their routine? And, in what ways does gym exercise affect the lives of its members?

The geographical availability of fitness clubs

The majority of my respondents state that they plan their gym visit ahead, sometimes a few days in advance, sometimes the evening before. A large number of gym goers exercise either before or after going to work. Some report using even more than one club on a regular basis, typically one near their workplace and one near home.[1] To the query, "Which club are you member of?" Sarah (age 32, research assistant) replies:

> *Sarah: I have three gyms that I use. If I work from home I go to the one in Croydon. If I am at the office, I go to the one on Oxford Street right after work. And if I'm staying with my boyfriend, I go to the one in Ealing straight from work and then go to his place.*

> *Ceren: So the gym is always between work and home?*

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[1] Those users typically own a membership card that gives them access to multiple clubs. In London LA Fitness has 20 clubs in total, half of them in the inner city. Fitness First has 50 locations and Virgin Active operates 53 clubs in central London.

Sarah: Oh yes. If I go home first, I get into the relaxing mood and I find it very difficult to go. I am not that kind of person, I can't do that. I see the gym as an extension of my work. Actually I'm going to try out the one in Euston. I am planning to go there during lunch time because by the end of the day I get so tired and I sometimes work until 8 or 9 and then there is literally no time to go the gym as they close at 10. So it's quite difficult to work around your schedule. It's doable but it means that you have to invest in it emotionally and physically and be prepared. That's why I have a gym bag at the office.

Like Sarah, many inner-city professionals from my sample use the gym either during lunch break or right after work. Given that Sarah embeds her exercise sessions into her work pattern, it is perhaps not surprising that she sees her gym regimen almost as an "extension of my work", as she states. This becomes even more evident in the binary she establishes between home and the gym. Whilst she associates the former with relaxation, the latter is regarded as a voluntary obligation that requires effort and "emotional and physical investment". During earlier parts of the interview, she explains how meticulously she structures her week to fit in the gym into her busy schedule which indicates the thoroughness and discipline she displays regarding her exercise routine. Her use of managerial vocabulary ("you have to invest in it") underlines Sarah's rational and utilitarian approach to the gym. She seems to hope that exercising even after a long, tiring day and spending her anyway limited recreational time will 'pay off' in the long-term.

Whilst most interviewees fit their gym visit into their work routine there are also six participants in my sample who take the opposite path: these gym users actually try to accommodate their work schedule into their gym exercise. It should be noted though that the participants in question are all either freelancers or students, therefore having more flexibility during the day than other people. Eric (age 42, marketing agent) is one of them:

Eric: It's kind of a funny thing. If you take the gym seriously, you think that it is the one thing you organize the other things around wherever it's possible. Obviously you know some requirements you can't juggle completely. But if you try

to put the gym time first then you organize other things around it. And that's useful about my membership that I can go to different places.

Eric takes the gym as the core of his daily activities. He seems to imply that the reason why he puts the gym first is his commitment and serious attitude towards his fitness programme. According to Green and Jones (2006), 'serious leisure' - in contrast to 'casual leisure' - involves some sort of a 'career' which "includes stages of achievement or reward…a progression throughout the activity" (Green & Jones, 2006, p.168). Further, and perhaps most relevant for the gym context, it requires some form of a 'training', the acquisition of knowledge, an accumulation of technical skills and a linguistic jargon rendering the leisure activity purpose- and meaningful. For Eric, the gym is clearly a serious leisure pursuit; its importance is equivalent to, or perhaps even exceeds, the one assigned to other activities in everyday life. Matthew (age 31, part-time PhD student and IT manager) has like Eric access to several fitness clubs in central London. Although he does not prioritize the gym over his work like Eric, he similarly regards the gym as a constant resource:

Matthew: For a long time I used to carry my gym bag with me pretty much everywhere, just in case I wanted to go, you know, just good to have it with you <grinning>(…) Now I have got my routines and know which days of the week I go.

No matter where Matthew is during the day, either at the university in central London, at the IT firm in Notting Hill or at a meeting with a client, the constant availability of the gym makes it practically possible to train whenever he wishes to. Grinning at me with an amused look, he seems to realize that carrying a gym bag everywhere one goes may be thought as a rather an odd habit. It indicates that Matthew's mind was (is?) constantly preoccupied with the opportunity to exercise. As he tells me later in the interview, he knows where most of the club's branches are and when he has a meeting with a client in an area that he is not familiar with his mobile phone application helps him to find the next club. What can be inferred from Matthew's account is that the geographical availability of fitness centres *reduces* the pragmatic excuses people may have for not exercising.

Thus, members like Matthew can take up rather unusual practices to keep their exercise gear near-by, constantly reminding themselves to make time for the gym. The geographical availability coupled with a multi-gym pass may even create pressure on the individual, or an inner compulsion. Peter (age 57, project manager in a publishing house) reports getting impatient and "resentful" when his work schedule does not permit him to pursue his gym regime.

> *Peter: Sometimes, probably sometimes I feel resentful. To make time for the gym, I would normally work couple of long days and try to go late the next day and I can go to the gym. And if I can't do that because I have got things in my schedule in my work I might feel resentful of my job really. Because it's preventing me from having a reasonable amount of spare time.*

Peter's account shows the significant role he assigns to the gym. He is ready to make adjustments to his work schedule (e.g. doing overtime) in order to go to the gym. And when meetings and other requirements "prevent" him from exercising he feels resentful towards his job which may even indicate his prioritization of the gym over his work.

Infinite time-scapes

Not only are most gyms in London densely spread throughout the city, they have also long opening hours. All three gyms I conducted my field research in opened between 6:30 and 7:00 in the morning and closed between 22:30 and 23:00 in the evening, with slightly shorter opening hours during the weekend. One recent trend that has exponentially proliferated is the 24-hour gym. These are places that operate either until midnight or even all day and night long, on seven days a week.[2] According to statistical data there is no empirically proven need for access at all hours for only a small minority actually do train overnight. Given the opening hours of gyms are flexible by the standards of most businesses and the number of participants using the gym after midnight is minimal, one must perhaps look at the meaning of 24/7 gyms from another perspective, asking what type of

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[2] According to a newspaper article published in The Guardian, in 2011 The Gym Group owned 10 all-night gyms in the UK . In 2012 this number increased to 18 and there are plans for a further 17 clubs to be opened in the next few years. In 2011, PureGym, another club chain, ran just 12 24-hour locales with the prospect of opening 32 more locales by 2014 (Kingsley, 2012).

discourse they support and give expression to. In order to unpack the discursive function of the 24-hour gym, it is useful to draw on Foucault's methodological imperative to compare heterotopia with places that are different from it. However, I wish to suggest a reversion of this principle and look at the use and meanings attached to places that operate *similarly* rather than differently. On the top of the list of those places that are open and operating 24/7 for the public are health and safety related institutions such as hospitals, pharmacies, police stations and fire brigades. Further, we find consumer places such as some gas stations, fast food restaurants and supermarkets. These two categories can be best described as places with essential functions: they are linked to human needs and/or crises. Health related locales respond to unanticipated events that require an immediate intervention (e.g. injuries, accidents or illness). Consumer places, on the other hand, are considered to be responding to people's wants and needs, often related to food and eating in general, which is itself an essential need.

It seems counter-intuitive to think of all-night gym as a place of crisis in the common sense of the term. Exercise is not a physical, or medical, 'need' that requires immediate satisfaction. However, the constant opening times seem to propose exactly this message. The gym, so the rationale goes, is available in case one *needs* it. With this thinking, the gym work-out turns into a necessity, an activity that needs to be carried out. Further, by being constantly available, the 24/7 gym engenders the idea that there is no right or appropriate time to go to the gym or, differently put, that it is theoretically *always* the right time to train. Although the 24/7 fitness club is a special occurrence amongst gyms, I would argue that it contributes to a more general pattern of thinking: Like the geographical omnipresence of many gyms, the 24/7 concept invites members to exercise regardless of time and location and ultimately frames gym exercise as vital a facet of human subjectivity.

Detachment from the quotidian

We have seen above that the gym regime can be treated with the same, or even greater, seriousness as work. The temporal and geographical availability of the gym can turn the gym exercise into a routinized stop between various other spaces, most notably home and work. In this section, I want to consider those

participants who regard the gym not primarily as a continuation of their everyday life. My data suggests that the gym can also be experienced as environment - especially for 'older' clients in their 50s and 60s and those without a paid employment - that facilitates detachment from the quotidian. A case vignette exemplifies this very well: Aisha is 40 year-old regular who gave up her job after getting married twelve years ago. On four mornings a week, she drives her two children to school and goes to the gym for approximately three hours (one hour on the treadmill, one hour in a class and one other strength training). It is the only thing that she does just for herself, she says, and describes her trip to the club as being "transported into another world". Amazed by the rather long hours she spends at the gym I ask her what she is thinking about during exercise:

> Aisha: Not much, there is a big TV screen where they play MTV shows and I watch that. I feel young again <giggling>, I feel great - Sometimes I tell myself «Don't enjoy yourself too much, you need to get dressed at noon and pick up the kids from school»…Time just flies there <laughing>."

Aisha would presumably have no difficulty with qualifying her gym being characterised as a heterotopic space, a spatio-temporal intensity that constitutes a break from quotidian tasks and obligations. Whilst at the gym, she clearly feels detached from the outer world, she even "feels young again". For Aisha exercising is a form of losing herself where time seems to stands still for at least a little while - until she reminds herself not to enjoy herself too much. The gym seems to take her into a state of mind free of household tasks, grocery lists and school runs. The intensity of involvement is such that not only does Aisha not consciously notice the passage of time, but she also recalls the time period as having been much briefer than it was in 'clock-time'.

Here, it is worth comparing Sarah's (p. 95) and Aisha's gym experiences as both cases have aspects in common whereas some aspects are rather divergent. In both cases, the gym experience and responsibilities of everyday life are interwoven; the gym is accommodated into their daily routines and, in turn, produces certain affective responses. However, these effects differ. To remember, Sarah regards the gym as a spatio-temporal *continuity* of her work which, as one may presume,

produces feelings of obligation and perhaps even stress. For Aisha on the contrary, the gym marks a *discontinuity* of the demands and obligations of everyday life and can be said to produce relaxation.[3] The gym enables her, as Foucault says of heterotopia, to "arrive at a sort of absolute break with [their] traditional time" (Foucault, 1986, p.6). The fact that different people can attach different meanings to the gym and experience it accordingly, should perhaps be no surprise.

5.2 Training for life

Above, I have outlined how the gym is often experienced as a spatial and temporal continuation of everyday life. Only a small fraction of respondents describe it as a discontinuation. This regularity plays a crucial role; it renders the gym a 'familiar' place, a place that impacts the ways in which people plan, structure and live their lives. In the following, I wish to examine how participants conceptualize the gym as affecting not only the rest of their day or week but also how they think the gym might affect them in 'deeper' ways, at the level of their subjectivity.

The proper regimen: the spill-over effects of the gym

The main regulatory and normalizing practice that accompanies exercise seems to be the right diet. Magazines and trainers convey the message that in order to be successful at fitness one must follow a proper diet regimen that exceeds the boundaries of the gym. The metamorphosis of the body cannot be completed only through the use of outside powers like the training equipment: it also requires interventions from *within*. In magazines, the 'right' food is regimented on various levels: temporally and quantitatively, the amount and frequency of food intake are prescribed and its ingredients and preparation process are elaborated. Interestingly, food is not only discussed in the light of exercise but its psychological benefits are also foregrounded. According to a publication on a gym's website, one can improve stress levels through sensible eating and "sip away" stress with teas.

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[3] The gym as a discontinuity of daily life is also emphasized by Markula (1995). Based on her research on aerobics she argues that the gym can provide an environment for women that allows them to take a time-out from their daily routines.

Nowadays, we suffer more from situational stress (deadlines, financial fears, emotional problems) than from physical stress. Yet, we feel the physical effects of adrenaline: a faster heartbeat, higher blood pressure, increased utilisation of energy and blood-sugar fluctuations, aggression and irritability, sleep disturbances, compromised immunity and appetite changes. When we're stressed, we tend to eat badly and opt for foods that are high in sugar and refined carbs….Here's how you can improve your stress levels through sensible eating:… Sip away your stress: herbal teas with chamomile…Eat calming foods…Be carb wise. (Powell, n.d).

The content of the passage above is based on a conventional bio-psychological model of emotions where the argument is as follows: environmental ('situational') stress leads to physiological discomfort (e.g. higher blood pressure) which then leads to emotional stress (e.g. aggression) which, in turn, makes people eat badly. According to the text one can reverse this entire process though, that is, one can decrease emotional stress by eating and drinking things that are low in calories, fat and carbohydrates.

Generally speaking, counting calories is encouraged at gyms. Lists published in fitness magazines show how many calories one can burn per exercise. For example, an hour walk is equated to 100 calories, spinning to 400 calories and Zumba classes even up to 600 calories. In reverse, it takes a 35 minute walk to 'burn off' a banana, 70 minutes of treadmill exercise for a piece of chocolate pie. As Boris (age 28, post-doc fellow) and Peter (age 57, project manager in a publishing house) state:

Boris: Only now I realize how fat cheese is, how many calories it has. It's unbearable. Horrible. But now I realize, I went and I took cottage cheese which is amazingly low in fat but very bad tasting as well. So I am on Philadelphia extra light. Not medium, extra light (laughing). I am not on a strict diet I am on a take care kind of diet. What do the Chinese say: you dig your grave with your teeth.

> *Peter: This week I was really really good all week and then on Friday I was I was really good until I went out for dinner and I got convinced to get something that wasn't healthy and then I had a rubbish weekend. I had McDonalds when I was drunk on Saturday night and then on Sunday it was like Mother's Day and I had some tea thing to go to and I just was like ah I'll have whatever here and all of a sudden just half my week was really bad and negated the whole good half of the week.*

Gym users, so the thinking goes, can overeat or eat unhealthy as long as they balance out this 'bad' behaviour by sweating it out at the gym. Thus, the idea is that food's value is determined by its amount of calories and fat. However, gym life influences people's eating choices in what may be considered an unexpected way as well. Whilst some people may go to the gym to eat what they want and some people, like in Boris' case below – paradoxically – eat to suit the calorie expenditure accomplished at the gym.

> *Boris: I managed to have a healthier eating habit. I don't know if it's healthier but its definitive cutting desert. I am not on any diet but I am like taking care. And I found it excellent that the gym makes me reinforce the diet. Yesterday, for example, when I went for a coffee with a friend, I saw all the cakes but took the shortbread which I don't even like. But I didn't want the full cake 'cause it's like, you are spending an hour there [the gym], you are killing yourself to go and eat that cake. You can have a smaller desert.*

Boris anticipates that he will spend an hour to burn off the cake and decides not to eat it. Hence, exercise is here not only regarded as a corrective for perceived inaccuracies or transgressions in eating behaviour but the gym starts to exert an important force on a series exercise choices. Performance routines in the gym environment are then organised in a precise fashion according to dominant beliefs about what type and intensity of exercise will ensure fat loss and, more often for men, improve muscle shape and tone. The acceptance of the work of dieting can be said to exemplify the production of a type of subjectivity that requires not only the self-subjection of the body to discipline and control but also the acquisition of new skills and capacities through which those normative behaviours can be

achieved (Foucault, 1977; Heyes, 2006). Also notable here is that how a concern with fitness leads to a general concern with health. There is an outward spiralling of concerns and behaviours that are subjected to a self-management and self-coaching schema of subjectivity.

Increasing productivity

All participants from my sample agreed that the gym visit positively affects the quality and 'flow' of their day. According to Rosie (age 24, post-graduate student), the gym gives her day a point of reference, a place either to depart from or arrive at.

> *Ceren: When do you usually go to the gym?*
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> *Rosie: I like going [to the gym] in the mornings - I use the gym to structure my day. I get up around 7, then go to the gym for an hour or one hour and fifteen minutes. And then I will have my breakfast and a shower and get some work done between 9:30 and 10:00 <energetic voice, speaks fast> And I find when I don't go, I get up later and then things move a lot slower. Like the process of going to the gym speeds up the day. It sets like a precedent to the way you want your day to go. Like if you get up and you have to do something, like going to the gym and you do it very quickly, it's quite a motivating thing, running or whatever - Maybe it's because maybe you are physically moving so far and everything is so fast, that sets a precedent and you are like wanting things to get done.*

What is striking about Rosie's account is the richness of details, describing how she follows a clearly structured morning routine split into different units of time. It indicates how carefully she organizes her day, making sure the gym is an integral part of it. The reason why she likes exercising in the morning before work is because it enables her to start and continue her day in a fast, efficient manner.[4] If she does not go to the gym, she feels that "things move a lot slower". The gym, so it seems, accelerates other daily routines ("speeds up the day") and sets "a precedent to the way you want your day to go". Rosie reflects upon her own perception and hypothesizes that it might be related to the quick physical movements during the training that make her more driven over the course of the

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[4] At the time of the interview Rosie was working on her application to get into a very competitive PhD programme at an Ivy League University.

day ("you are like wanting things to get done). For Rosie, the gym regimen is strongly related to her work in so far as it creates a sense of efficiency. A similar view is captured in the following two quotations:

Samantha: There is something kind of sluggish about the pace of your day unless you go. You kind of feel that things need to speed up at some point. Or you just sit around all day and sit on the tube, sit at work, sit at home, sit on the couch (…)

Boris: In life the urge to procrastinate is very strong and the gym helps me, becomes part of my programme and for that, makes me more efficient (…) And since I've started exercising I am better at writing my thesis actually.

Looking at the two accounts above one gets the impression that the gym provides users with a sense of productivity, a sense of achievement that highly impacts the course of their daily lives. Whilst Samantha (age 29, administrative staff) comments rather generally on how the gym responds to her "need to speed up" things, Boris (age 28, post-doc fellow) refers to how the gym exercise increases his personal and professional efficacy. He has established the gym as part of his "programme" by which he refers to his work schedule as a PhD student. Boris exercises at the gym not just to control and enhance his physical fitness but primarily to increase his work productivity. Such an approach to the gym is not exceptional. Many respondents, most notably young professionals, hold a similar view. When I ask Meredith (32, client executive) how often she trains at the gym, she describes how her working-out pattern depends on the workload at her job:

Meredith: I try to go three to four times a week (…) I exercise more when I am stressed. I certainly do, because - I certainly exercise more when I am stressed, I can make that correlation. It makes me feel as if I had a bigger sense of control in my life.

It seems that for both Meredith and Boris exercise at the gym helps them to "control" their lives. Although it takes time and effort to incorporate the gym into their daily schedule, both participants are convinced that the gym will ultimately help them to accomplish more and perform better in the realm of professional life. Both participants' accounts coincide with a widespread discourse on how the gym

is supposed to reduce stress. The London Time Out Guide to Health and Fitness (2007), for example, presents the gym as a remedy:

> *It is an inescapable fact that we Londoners operate in the fast lane…such speed is leading us to a life of ever-greater extreme…forces us into ever; longer and more stressful working pattern and dramatically tilts our work-life balance. We may be cash-rich but we're also increasingly time-poor…There is however a way forward…it is important to make exercise an integral part of our day…and think about why we are going to the gym. (London Time Out Guide to Health and Fitness, 2007, p.19)*

It is argued here that the pace of the city leads to extreme lifestyles with long working hours and less time for recreation. At first sight, it sounds counter-intuitive and even paradoxical to suggest that the gym could provide a solution: Given a lack of recreation time (called "work-life balance" here) is presented as the core problem, it is not clear how the gym as something that requires extra planning and work itself can be seen as a solution. This rationale can only be understood if one frames it within the efficiency and productivity discourse discussed above: Only if participants embrace the discourse that the gym renders people more effective, competent and productive can they expect the gym to be a warrant against stress and exhaustion. The gym may then require extra effort and time, so the thinking goes, but it is regarded as investment that will ultimately decrease the effort and time that is needed for other things in life.

Here, it is worth looking at the notion of 'fitness' itself. The word certainly evokes evolutionary, that is, biological connotations and can at the same time be read in a psychological manner. In biological sciences, fitness refers to "an organism's ability to survive and reproduce in a particular environment" and 'fit' is equated to well suited, well adapted, qualified; competent, worthy, ready and good enough (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2010). Transferred from its biological context, this understanding coincides with the accounts given by the interviewees above. Matthew, for example, describes the gym's benefits as follows:

Matthew: I sleep better, I eat better, yes, I look better, larger, bigger. I quite like it to be honest; it makes me more confident somehow. But this point is not as important as it was when I was 20. It's now more, I can feel that my testosterone level has increased constantly. And this makes me more confident, too. I'm more like ready to combat daily stress and I'm ready for situations where I need more power and stability. So the increased testosterone level is an important point for me in terms of the gym.

Being more confident, prepared, better equipped and resilient to external threats is regarded by him as a major gain of the gym. As he says, looking better, larger and bigger gives him the confidence and the ability to combat stress. Further, being ready for situations that require power and stability are, according to Matthew, achieved through the strong gym-shaped physique, and the increased level of testosterone. The firm, muscular body – so the thinking goes – not only projects but also causes psychological solidness. The emphasis on the male sex hormone testosterone can be read at least as implying, if not openly stating, the supposed effects of exercise for the male sexual drive and potency. Mat seems to imply that what one overcomes with exercise is 'weakness' and what one gains is power, stability and confidence, which can be translated into sexual energy and confidence, or, 'manliness'.[5]

5.4 Discipline and ritual

One of the reasons why participants feel a higher sense of efficacy, control and determinacy in their lives may be related to the ways in which gym reinforces ritualized self-discipline. As I have experienced myself during fieldwork, following a training schedule requires devotion and endurance over the course of several months. I can also infer from my own embodied involvement in the field that even a single accomplished session at the gym can induce a sense of achievement. In the last six months of my field work I went regularly to several spinning classes a week. More often than not, I felt a physical buzz and I found

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[5] Indeed, the link between sexual potency and muscularity is continually being made in the world of fitness. One of the main strategies is to do so is through the visual display of the muscly body. Shaved, smooth and tanned the male body carries the aura of physical potency and yet goes further than that, implying sexual strength. Referring to the bodies of muscular public figures, Miles observes that "each [body] becomes a public phallus, huge, rock-hard, gleaming and veined with blood" (Miles, 1991, p.111). In other words, the body's 'material' qualities such as its contours, surfaces and textures become the locus of potency display.

myself in a, what I sometimes thought of as, 'manic' state: In the first weeks of training I actually needed less sleep, my self-confidence had increased and I had, after each work-out, a sense that I could get more work done right away - even after late evening classes. A web blogger puts it succinctly when he writes about what he considers to be the benefits of spinning:

> *Self-discipline of the mind gained in spinning can be applied to all areas of life. I have found it most beneficial in areas of self-control and confidence. Spinning helps develop a positive, 'can do' attitude. (Dawn, n.d.)*

This 'can do' attitude bears parallels to Matthew's sense on how the gym prepares him for situations that require physical and psychological strength. What is implied in the preceding blog entry is that discipline and efficiency in- and outside the gym reinforce each other: being disciplined during training is considered to be helping gym participants to be more disciplined outside the gym, as well. When I ask Alexander (age 28, sales manager) whether he thinks the gym has an effect on his life, he responds at length:

> *Alexander: I find that you've started going to the gym and it's become part of your routine it gives you more energy to do other things just because you're used to being active after a while and so all of a sudden say it's like 10 at night and I need to go to the shop to get something, all of a sudden I'm like yeh I'll just go and get it whereas beforehand I'd be like forget it I'll do it tomorrow or another day or another day or another day(…) Going to the gym even though you're like spending loads of energy makes you a lot more energetic in general I find. And it makes you just a lot more up for doing things in general. I guess I can be quite lazy which affects me quite a lot, I like going to the gym because it keeps me going a bit more even when I'm not at the gym. And then you're probably a lot happier with yourself when you've been going to the gym a lot really. Whereas when I start going to the gym everything becomes more do-able (…) Deep inside I'm one of the laziest people ever.*

> *Ceren: Naïve question- what would you say is so bad about being lazy?*

Alexander: There's nothing inherently bad about being lazy, it's just the pace of life we live especially in London - the difference of living up in Leeds and here is amazing. Everyone is living at a faster pace, if you're being a bit lazy, you start to get left behind in various things so like sort if you're not, even with just my friends, if I'm not actively engaging with them, very easily a whole week will pass without speaking to anyone and sort of nothing has been thought off it because they've been getting on with their stuff.

Alexander associates the gym work-out with being energetic, efficient and "up for things." He believes that the gym "keeps him going" and makes him happier. When I ask him – rather provocatively – whether laziness is necessarily a bad thing he reveals that his main concern is to keep up with the pace of his friends and colleagues. There is a sense that training 'synchronizes' his personal rhythm with the rhythm of the social environment he is part of.

Working out at the gym can perhaps be best described as a more or less long-lasting (sometimes over years), iterant pattern of conduct that consists of similar, routinized, bodily practices. My analysis indicates that some participants regard it as a form of what might be called 'rehearsal', or training, for life: if one succeeds at this type of training, so the thinking of many participants goes, one will also succeed in other areas of life, become more productive and efficient. Personal qualities demanded by a serious fitness regime such as diligence, devotion, and discipline are expected to be echoed in the world outside the gym.

5.5 Optimizing psychological well-being

As mentioned in the preceding section, the majority of the interviewees did not experience any explicit health-related problems that led them to join a fitness centre. Rather, a general quest for better health and fitness was presented as their primary motivation. However, we have seen that there is a wide range of issues participants expect to resolve, or tackle, with their gym regimen that go beyond fitness concerns. These are predominantly related to their levels of efficiency and productivity at work but are also associated with a more fulfilling social life, like in Alexander's case. A further implication of the gym that has been mentioned by interviewees is an expected increase in psychological well-being. Both have

joined the gym to get fitter but also, as they explicitly state in the interview, to overcome a difficult time in their lives.

> *Diane: Psychologically you feel better (…) I lost three of my closest relatives within four years. It was a difficult time - - And it's good to do some exercise, to go out. It helps. Your brain – I don't know much about it. The articles that I have read, it's good for your body. Endorphins, isn't it? (…).*

At the time of the interview Diane (age 64, free-lance translator) has been a gym member for nine months. She has never been exercising before and it was after the losses of some close family members that she decided to sign up. Following the advice of magazines she hoped the gym would have therapeutic effects, helping her in this vulnerable life situation. Olivia (age 33, secondary school teacher) employed the gym also as a therapeutic strategy:

> *Olivia: Back then I had some serious problems with my job - and my relationship <laughing> - - Basically my contract had ended and with the recession and all that I had a really really tough time finding new employment. I don't know how many applications I've sent out (…) I got seriously depressed. My GP wanted to prescribe some medication but I didn't want that (…) That was when I gave the gym a thought, just to do something for myself and keep on going.*

Instead of taking the antidepressants her General Practitioner advised her to take, Olivia decided to work out at a gym, hoping that the exercise will help her to "keep on going". Given the recent break up with her boyfriend and the loss of her job she used the gym as a ways to "pull herself together".[6] Both Diane and Olivia remain vague in her descriptions about how the gym work-out exactly might have helped them to overcome a difficult time in their lives. Shawn (35, technical assistant) and Jessica (43, art historian) emphasize the gym's positive effects on their psyche, too:

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[6] Health professionals advice patients with affective disorders such as depression to exercise regularly. This is often explained along the lines of Diane's account, stating that the increase of endorphins leads to higher moods. The discourse the NHS employs offers yet another explanation that bears strong parallels participants' accounts. Here, it is stated that "Exercise gives them [depressive patients] back control of their bodies and this is often the first step to feeling in control of other events" (National Health Service, 2014).This cognitiv-behavioural approach to treatment of psychological illness coincides with the utilitarian use of the gym that many participants display.

Shawn: It [the gym] blows off steam. You have a way of blowing off steam you have a way of escaping. But not having that escape, I think allows frustration and depression and everything builds into you, it's not good.

Jessica: If I am not exercising at all, I am usually more stressed out and in worst moods. My stomach is more sensitive and upset to the foods I eat. I am like getting super bloated because all the stress goes to my stomach. … Physically I feel good because I take out my stress out in a work-out; it doesn't manifest itself in my stomach.

Stress, depression, bad moods and frustration are the 'symptoms' Shawn and Jessica expect to combat by the gym regime. It is almost as if these negative states were 'things' that run the risk of manifesting themselves into the body ("the stress goes to my stomach" or "depression builds into you"). Exercise, so the thinking goes, is purgative; it releases stress and frustration by relocating it to the exteriors of the body and soul. It is worth noting that all four interview excerpts are underpinned by a psycho-somatic understanding of human subjectivity. Their conceptualization of the gym as a warrant against psychological stress is based on the premise that bodily processes have an effect on mental states and vice versa. A psycho-somatically informed way of reasoning is employed by the fitness industry, too. Promotional material keenly advertises the preventive function of the gym – not just on the basis of its physical but also its psychological benefits. A, probably staged, 'interview' with the pop-singer Alesha Dixon[7] published on the LA Fitness' homepage is illustrative of that:

Alesha Dixon: When I've had really dark moments probably the last thing on my mind is to exercise but from a day-to-day perspective if I felt sluggish and looked out of the window at another grey day that reflects in our skin and in our face and in our appearance and I do think, 'If I push myself to go to the gym and I treat myself to a steam room then when I come out and I've got colour in my cheeks again and I feel alive and that makes me feel great,' then that's one of the things I love about exercise. It has the ability to pick you up.

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[7] Alesha Dixon was being employed as the club's representative when I conducted fieldwork there.

This extract is part of a longer text used by LA Fitness as part of their marketing campaign and has the clear aim to sustain and increase their clientele. The text makes use of emotion vocabularies and describes the gym as a prophylaxis that saves clients from unwanted psychological states. In a way, it follows a very similar rationale as the preceding accounts of participants. What is interesting to note here, though, is that it is not necessarily exercise that is presented as a remedy against "dark moments" but another amenity at the gym, namely the steam room.[8] By doing so, the gym's functions are automatically widened; the fitness club is here not limited to its exercise function but its definition is broadened, including the more recreational features, having immediate impact on the 'body *and* soul'. One female participant, Agnes (age 48, university lecturer), explains that she and her husband have a membership at The Park but she does not 'really' exercise there (anymore). Instead, she goes there every Sunday, mainly to use the Jacuzzi, or to get a massage or a beauty treatment, and to have lunch at the restaurant. The Park displays such a wide range of services, and promotes itself more like a country club than a gym, that it does not have to rely on its exercise-related amenities to attract members. Again, what we find here is that the gym does not target the body in isolation but that bodily treatments and interventions come always with what Foucault terms 'soul-effects'.

Returning to the persistent link participants and advertisers make between the gym and various aspects of the self (e.g. increased psychological well-being, efficiency at work etc.), one can ask whether the fitness centre is indeed a localisable, or "distorted" utopia (Vattimo, 1992, p.69), or in Susan Scotts conceptual terms, whether it is *transformative* space. Levitas' (2010) analytic definition of utopia is particularly useful here. She maintains that the essential feature that runs through all utopias is the "desire for a different, better way of being" and living (Levitas, 2010, p. 219). Regardless of the form and content, all utopias have the following function: they typically generate hopes, fantasies and daydreams and thus 'compensate' for existing conditions and, equally, evoke the desire for change and transformation. In Levitas' conceptualization it is not

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[8] Clubs that have saunas, swimming pools or spa areas emphasize the relaxation element and the 'psychological' benefits of gyms more often in their advertisements than clubs which are limited to exercising facilities.

decisive whether utopias exist in fantasy or reality, whether the objects of desire are realistic to achieve or not, or whether they are underpinned by progressive or conservative politics.

Given that many gym participants hope, and indeed perceive themselves to have a more efficient, productive and happier life one has no difficulties assigning utopian thinking to gym members. What one expects to achieve at the gym, and what the gym conversely promises, is a *better version of one's embodied self*. Foucault's thoughts on the 'utopian body' can assist us. Here, he explains to what utopia owes its "beauty, its marvel":

> Utopia is a place outside of all places, but it is a place where I will have a body without body, a body that will be beautiful, limpid, transparent, luminous, speedy, colossal and its power, infinite in its duration. Untethered, invisible, protected – always transfigured. It may very well be the first utopia, the one that most deeply in the hearts of men (sic)…it is the land where wounds are healed with marvellous beauty in the blink of an eye (…) In any case, one thing is certain: that the human body is the principal actor in all utopias. After all, isn't one of the oldest utopias about which men (sic) have told themselves stories the dream of an immense and colossal body that could devour space and master the world. This is the old utopia of giants that one finds at the heart of so many legends…from Prometheus to Gulliver. (Foucault 1996 cited in Jones, 2006, p.230ff)

If utopia is the "repository of desire", as Levitas puts it (Levitas, 2010, p.230), and if gym goers desire an "immense and colossal body" to master the world, we might ask how exactly utopian thinking is provoked at the gym. In other words, are there any spatial and material practices that invite gym users to think they have more control over their lives, tackle stress more powerfully and keep up with the demands of everyday life more easily? In order to address these questions, the next section looks at the working principles of some exercise machines on the gym floor.

5.6 Of machines and bodies

Fitness trainers recommend a warm-up exercise on one of the so-called 'cardio' machines before proceeding to strength training. These are devices whose operating requires an increase in users' cardio-vascular activity. Accordingly, a large section of gyms are occupied by these types of machines. These machines do not just prescribe certain forms of conduct whilst disallowing for others, they also initiate a certain way of thinking about and relating to the body and the self. In the following, I take the treadmill as an example as I think that it is illustrative of the logics underlying all cardio machines.

The treadmill

The treadmill consists of a long, flat, moving platform that enables gym participants to run or walk while staying at the same place. Once the start button on the control panel is pressed the platform starts to move very slowly whereas its pace can then be manually increased.

Figure 4 The control panel of a treadmill, by the author
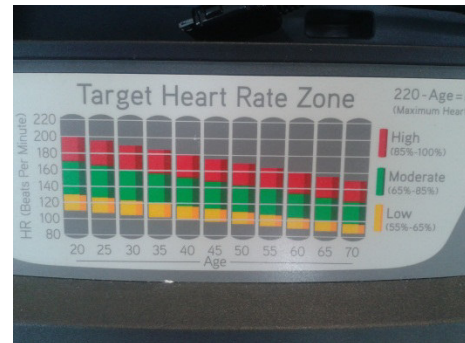
Figure 5 Norm table on a treadmill, by the author

During my fieldwork, I have observed a huge variety of performances amongst users, from some participants who do a brisk walk and some who run 14 to 16km per hour. Whilst most clients are active on the treadmill for ten to thirty minutes, I have also witnessed some who run for several hours, probably training for an upcoming marathon. Meredith (age 32, client executive) explains why she likes

exercising on the treadmill, and actually finds it more convenient than running outdoors:

> *Meredith: I don't usually run on the street, I'm too self-conscious for that. I tried it a couple of times but where I live the streets are quite busy and you have to stop in front of the lights. On weekends there are families with their kids and dogs and it's really a hassle. And also it's not good to run on concrete. And with the treadmill you can decide which speed you want, you don't depend on the weather, there is no traffic, no people, and it's less miserable than jogging.*

Meredith describes herself as self-conscious and explains that the gym offers a less intimidating environment in which to exercise. She also mentions the practical side of the treadmill: whilst bad weather, traffic, pedestrians etc. can prevent an uninterrupted run, the treadmill is located in a well-tempered fitness club and can be switched on and off manually. Looking at the different programmes on the machine, there is the sense that the treadmill seeks to resemble the outside world. Put simply, there is one 'manual' mode and several pre-set modes with labels such as 'rolling hills', '5k', 'interval', 'fat burn' or 'hike'. Once one of the latter modes is chosen, speed and intensity are determined by the machine, and vary during the course of the exercise. Although the labels suggest a similarity with a challenge to be accomplished in the natural world, physical exercise on the treadmill is less exhausting than running without the aid of the machine. Based on my own experience I can report that a 60-minute exercise on a treadmill does by no means guarantee one's ability to run outdoors for 60 minutes even at a very moderate speed. This is why Meredith considers jogging on the treadmill as being "less miserable" than jogging outdoors. As she hints upon, the treadmill is more comfortable and easier to handle than the 'real' exercise that it seeks to imitate. She may not just talk about the physical capabilities here though. Running on pavements in public can be said to require psychological 'toughness' as it means an exposure of one's moving body to the gaze of strangers passing by.

Although the treadmill's programme resembles an authentic jogging or hiking experience it has, with Baudriallard (1983), not always much "relation to any reality whatsoever": one does move without moving *forward*, that is, one moves

but still doesn't change one's position in space. Baudrillard introduces the notion of 'simulacrum' in the context of his theory of 'hyperreality', a blueprint of reality that somehow seeks to exceed the same, that presents itself 'more real', more intense but ultimately, fails (a famous example being Disneyland). In a way, the treadmill 'fails' to mimick reality, too. Although the functions of the treadmill bear names reminiscent of outdoor activities the device is actually far from being a reflection of reality. As an interviewee stated, a hiking trip or a marathon in the 'real' world cannot be successfully mimicked on this device. Moreover, it is questionable whether exercisers even *imagine* the treadmill to be a replacement of an outdoor run, a copy of an original as it were, or whether they see it as an original itself – without a reference to an outside model.

Everyone in my sample has reported to be using the treadmill or another cardio machine on a regular basis. That cardio vascular activity is recommend as a warm-up is certainly not the only reason why these machines are so popular. Treadmills, and other cardio equipment, seem much more multifarious and precise. Not only is it a particular mode the user can determine but personal information such as age, weight and desired length of exercise are usually provided beforehand. There is, then, a sense of a perfect accommodation to individuality within the machine, a sense that the device is sensible for the subjective whilst remaining universal enough to guarantee best results. As we will see in the chapters to come, this *individualizing* effect is inherent to other activities at the gym, too. Coming back to treadmill, after the user has opted for a pre-set mode, the speed and the gradient of the plane are automatically in- and decreased and the calorie expenditure and the build-up of muscled are 'optimized'. During exercise, participants can monitor their heart rate by putting their palms on a silver censor. In order to assess the heart rate, there is a table on the treadmill demonstrating ideal numbers for each training goal and age group. For weight loss and control, for example, the spectrum ranges from 130 to 150 beats per minute. What is clearly facilitated by these norm values, materialized in tangible tables, is the process of comparison with seemingly medico-normative standards that should be aimed at. Elisha (31, primary school teacher) who wants to lose weight to reduce the risk diabetes states:

> *Elisha: When I'm on the elliptical I always make sure that my heart rate does not go above or below 140-145. Towards the end of my training I run a little bit faster and reach 160 for a minute or two, just to get my heart up for a while.*

One effect of the treadmill's feedback facility is that it encourages constant monitoring and adjustment which, in turn, entails self-monitoring. Here, the smallest change in bodily functions is being registered, possible 'inefficiencies' spotted and interventions realised. Another number that accompanies the exercise is delivered by the calorie counter which increases as the exercise continues. Speed and the distance are displayed in red light numbers, too. All these calculations seem to be of importance for the exercise. Especially female participants report to be vigilant about their calorie expenditure:

> *Joanna: I always count calories when I go to the gym and of course I don't count calories on the weights. But always when I am running and when I am on the step machines I will always count calories. I have my target. So I know for example it is 500 calories and what I do on weights is always extra.*
>
> *Ceren: Why 500?*
>
> *Joanna: I don't know. It's just not too much and I know I can eat for 500 calories more a day.*

The ability to monitor the result of her physical activity drives Joanna (age 30, assistant in a law firm) towards a certain goal. As she tells me later in the interview, when she took up her gym regime she managed to burn 200 calories in thirty minutes. Over the course of six months she reached first 300, then 400 calories, now aiming 500 calories. In other words, the *operationalization* of bodily effort into quantifiable measurements which lies at the heart of the treadmill invites Joanna to set herself sub-goals each of which she is able to assess and progressively to conquer. On leaving the gym, she transports these numbers into the realm of everyday life, especially with regards to food intake. Samantha similarly manages her performance on the cardio machine by adhering both to calories and time:

> *Samantha: It's always 50 minutes because I think it's kind of a goal that I set for myself. I normally try to get to 400 calories but it's not because, I mean well, then I can eat four cookies or something like that. It's more, like it's just another bench mark.*

> *Ceren: Time is an important benchmark. Are there other possible calculations?*

> *Samantha: Distance. I try to go for 10 kilometres an hour, for a certain time. I say to myself, well for the next 4 minutes I go 10 kilometres an hour and then I do that. At the end, the average is something like 6 kilometres an hour.*

The display on the treadmill allows Samantha (age 29, administrative staff) to drive towards higher figures in terms of speed and duration of the exercise. Like Meredith (age 32, client executive), the calories she burns at the gym are taken as 'tokens' that can be exchanged against food.[9] In a way, then, training on the treadmill can be said to be a *productive* exercise in a sense that users generate – via the machine – numbers, calculations and calibrations. As my observations indicate, runners switch between calibrations during exercise. Some interviewees report that they set themselves new records from time to time, creating new challenges and personal 'bests'. To elaborate more on the "productive force" of the gym machine, it is useful to refer back to the treadmill's use in prisons in the 19th century first introduced in Chapter 3.

To remember, the treadmill as a punitive device was employed to deter and discourage prisoners from further crimes after their release. The fact that it was basically useless labour, that is labour without an end product or a reward, intensified its 'moral orthopaedic' effect: it was deemed necessary as a rehabilitative and preventive technology that would render the prisoner docile, disciplining both the body and the mind. Interestingly, some prisons tied the activation of the treadmill to a reward. Prisoners had to 'work' on the treadmill for a set number of times and earned, in turn, their food (National Archives, 2013).

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[9] It is actually very common and not unusual at all for instructors in classes to make references to the calorie expenditure. After a Zumba class an instructor said smilingly to the group "You have certainly burnt 600 calories today. Well done!" as a way of reassuring and encouraging the participants. Similarly, I had one spinning instructor who asked us after a bank holiday weekend whether we had been eating and drinking a lot – obviously implying that we would lose all those calories we had gained in the course of the present session.

What distinguishes the treadmill with a meal as reward from the one without is obviously the lack of compensation in the aftermath of the imposed activity. The lack of compensation renders the imposed activity as even more useless for the prisoner and as devoid of meaning. Activating the treadmill might not be something that the prisoner enjoys, but it is attached to an exchange value so that the food may be perceived as a product of one's own labour. With the risk of overstretching the analogy, the treadmill at the gym devoid of all calorie counting may also be experienced as a form of, if not penalty, perhaps a useless drill. As we have seen in the interview excerpts above, the display of figures on the treadmill 'compensate' the work-out either with calorie expenditure to be spent later on food or with a higher heart rate and larger distance to increase their fitness levels. This type of connection between food and gym exercise might partly explain that treadmills, especially in North America, have increasingly become routine household objects. One of the obvious differences between treadmills in prisons and treadmills in gyms is that the use of the latter is based on a voluntary act and not reinforced by an external force.[10] In other words, it is the gym participant herself that exercises power upon her body and mind. The user gets preoccupied with self- improvement, and as a prerequisite of it, self-mastery. When we look at the treadmill as used in prisons, we can see that 'improvement' and 'mastery' are not very far from the rehabilitative effect the punitive device was employed for. Whilst the activation may serve different goals (punishment/rehabilitation versus exercise) both machines have similar effects: by taking the body as a target they function as a *disciplinary technology*.

The ultimate aim of this technology is to transform and to improve the individual. This is somehow extends the idea of the gym as a recreational space where exercise is thought to be an escape from and release of such concerns. At the same time, it accounts for the fact that participants think that gym exercise renders them more efficient and productive in everyday life. What one can note here is that the required disciplining of bodies and minds on machines such as the treadmill goes hand in hand with participants' perceived increase in everyday effectiveness,

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[10] To anticipate what will follow in Chapter 6, exercising on the treadmill with a fitness trainer rather than a machine evokes a different set of analytical observations. Here, the personal trainer may indeed be regarded as an external force which has an impact on the trainee's behaviour, thoughts and affects.

productivity and control. As Alexander's (age28, sales manager) account shows, controlling and mastering one's own body can actually lead to positive feelings:

> *Alexander: I mean think there's a hell of a lot of self-control that you achieve from going to the gym. I always think it's almost like you know how in like eating disorders you know it's so much about control which people never talk about in the media for some reason it's always about the self, the image that magazines are giving off and stuff and it's not, it's about control (…)I think it's about a feeling that going to the gym makes you feel .I get really proud of myself when I've been to the gym a lot in the week and done and feel really good about myself. You know it is sort of, a bit of it's not a challenge, well it is a challenge but not you know a sort of type of challenge which you do feel good when you pass your challenge.*

Alexander reflects here on what might motivate him and other people to go the gym. He argues that aesthetic reasons are only one side of the coin, however, self-control is just as important. Pride and sensations of accomplishment are actually the 'real' reasons why people go to the gym, he believes. Indeed, as the interview excerpts throughout this chapter have illustrated, feelings of accomplishment generated in the gym are not restricted to the locale but transcend its boundaries, leaving traces in the everyday life of its users.[11]

The compartmentalisation of the body

The precision, through which time at the gym is divided into exact units, where each movement is allocated a specific length of time and space, is best illustrated by the strength machine. Here the units do not so much consist of minutes or calories, as on cardio machines, but of repetitions, sets and weights.[12] Typically gyms have a wide range of weight machines targeting a particular muscle group.

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[11] There is a large body of scientific scholarship that examines the neurobiology of the brain during exercise and its impact on people's psychological well-being. The focus here is on how exercise stimulates certain physiological responses that in turn lead to higher moods, for example through the release of serotonin, dopamine and endorphins (for an overview see Silva et al. 2014). Whilst these somatic changes during exercise are certainly important when we try to understand sport's positive psychological effects, my aim in this thesis is to unpack the *discursive* logics that underpin of these emotional and psychological changes in the individual.

[12] A 'repetition' is one complete movement on the weight machine whereas a 'set' is a group of consecutive repetitions with breaks in-between. 'Weights' are rectangular plates attached to the strength machine; usually each of them is marked with a number indicating the actual weight of the plate (5kg, 10kg, 15kg etc.).

If gym members decide to take up strength training gym staff usually designs a programme for them. According to participants' fitness goals (e.g. toning up, losing weight or becoming 'big'), trainers determine which machines to use, how much weight to lift and how many repetitions and sets to accomplish.

During my fieldwork I asked an 'advanced' gym user (he was big and muscular and I saw him coming in a few times a week) what his training schedule looked like. He explained that on one day he would work his "pulling muscles" such as his back muscles, biceps or abdominals whereas in the succeeding session he would work his "pushing muscles" such as chest, triceps and shoulders. He further maintained that this apparently popular way of splitting one's schedule allowed each muscle group to rest for at least 24 hours – a time frame recommended by fitness experts for the muscles to recover and rebuild. This participant also told me that it was necessary to change one's schedule from time to time. In a similar vein, an advice book on fitness:

> *After you have a basic routine … expand your repertoire so you have more options to choose from. Varying your exercises keeps you more interested and can help you get better results. If you stick with the same routine month after month, year after year, your muscles adapt to those exercises; but by working your muscles from a variety of angles, you involve more muscle fibres and keep your muscles challenged. (Thorton, 1999)*

To exercise with muscles groups "from a variety of angles" is also suggested by the weight machines that are explicitly labelled. The body is treated as an 'anatomical atlas' through which the user can find her way both through the fitness gym and her own body. Indeed, walking through the gym from machine to machine is simultaneously walking from muscle group to muscle group. What this mapping, or compartmentalization, of the body does, is two-fold. For one, the body gains depth. What is beneath the skin and the contours of body mass becomes *imaginable* to the gym user. As a consequence, the body turns into an object that can be studied and worked upon. Second, by deciding which parts of one's embodiment to train with which intensity, participants are encouraged to distribute themselves in gym space. Given that the gym equipment is typically

ordered in a recognisable geometrical grid, often in rows or in semi-circles, it is not difficult for the participant to orient herself in space. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault writes that disciplinary power often operates through the technique of 'partitioning' where the aim is to "eliminate the effects of imprecise distributions, the uncontrolled disappearance of individuals, their diffuse circulation, their unusable ... coagulation" (1977, p. 143). In the gym, each individual body is allocated a precise location that is inhabited for an exact set of repetitions and breaks in-between. The places Foucault has in mind when he writes about 'the art of distribution' are military barracks, boarding schools, or prisons – just to name a few examples. However, in contrast to those spaces, spatial distribution at the gym is not necessarily employed to control and supervise others but to control, supervise and govern one's self.[13] This is a crucial distinction to make as it alludes to a fundamental difference between the gym and all other spaces that seek to educate, to heal, to train and so on. If we take the Foucault's notion of power as relational and enacted seriously, what we find at the gym can be thought off as power enacted towards one's self; power that takes as the object of discipline the *own* body and mind. As I will show below, this type of enactment is often experienced with pleasure and contentment by gym users.

The 'medico-scientific' way of exercising

In the two years of fieldwork, I witnessed a few changes on the gym floors of the three gyms that studied. Whilst most exercise equipment stayed the same, some new machines were introduced and others were replaced by new models that were promoted as more efficient than existing ones. There is an interesting tension to note though: some of the new machines promote a sense of technical advancement, whilst others propagate a 'back-to-the-basics' approach. One example for the first type is the *Power Plate*. The exercises are done on a vibrating surface, which leads to

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[13] In a lecture in 1980, Foucault indicates that his conceptualization of discipline may have been restricted in his prior analyses: "When I was studying asylums, prisons, and so on, I insisted, I think, too much on the techniques of domination. What we can call discipline is something really important in these kinds of institutions, but it is only at one aspect of the art of governing people in our society" (Foucault 1993, 204). With this comment, he hints at what he would later call 'technologies of the self', accounting for the discipline and power individuals exercise upon themselves.

quicker workouts, as the whole body triggers more muscle fibres to engage during your exercise (…) The Power Plate can stimulate immediate increase in circulation, oxygenating the blood, improving the removal of toxins and help to reduce cellulite. A sustained long-term weight loss of up to 10% can also be achieved. The Power Plate has the potential to increase bone mineral density and improve your muscle strength. This can have an immediate increase in blood flow, improving the body's ability to transport oxygen, macro-micro nutrients around the body and dispersing waste products more efficiently. (PureGym, n.d.)

Bearing in mind that almost all strength machines at the gym operate mechanically, the Power Plate's appeal seems to lay in its electronic, automatized application.

The *Suspension Trainer* on the other hand is an interesting example for the gym's perpetuation of new technologies that promote simplicity. It is a form of resistance training where the exerciser only uses a rope and her own body weight According to its developers, it

delivers a fast, effective total-body workout, helps build a rock-solid core, increases muscular endurance, benefits people of all fitness levels (pro athletes to seniors), can be set-up anywhere (gym, home, hotel or outside).(TRX Training, n.d.)

Unlike most strength machines that specialize in single muscle groups, the suspension trainer displays a multipurpose simultaneity. The logic guiding the device is not entirely new for its forerunners have been introduced to the market in the 19th century. The *Pangymnastikon*, for example, - an exercise machine invented by a German physiologist in 1842 - was celebrated for its multifunctional capacities (figure 6).[14] It was said to "bring[s] every part of the body into varied action, giving the left arm, shoulder - the entire left half of the body as much and as varied exercise as the right" (Schreber, 1864 cited in Lewis, 2011, p.170). Interesting to note, this machine was designed for the use of all ages and genders and hence shows a remarkable similarity to the modern suspension trainer's

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[14] The prefix 'pan-' (Greek: all, everything) indicates two things: First, that it can be used by everyone and second that it trains the entire body.

universality claim. The over 50 recorded exercises on the pangymnastikon were graduated according to the level of difficulty. Some were "simple enough for children", as its developer stated, and some were for the already trained body. The device was said to be designed not only for the working class but for "those who fill the ranks of intellectual life, and who require as a condition of success, good health and strong vitality" (Schreber, 1864 cited in Lewis, 2011, p.170).
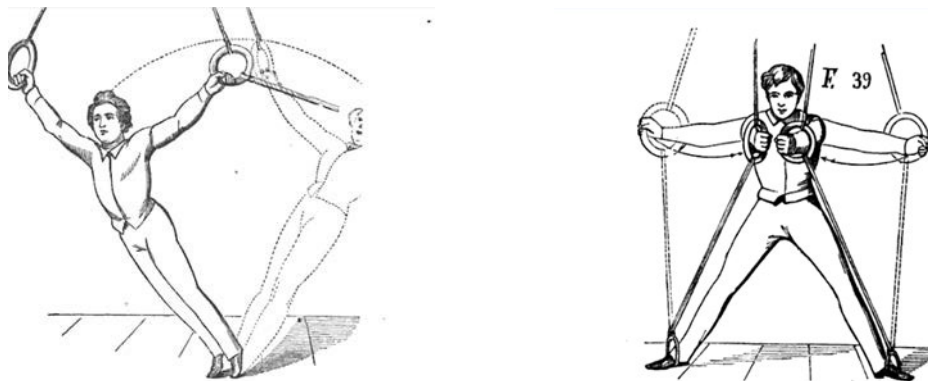
Figure 6 Pangymnastikon (Lewis, 2011, p. 198 and p. 213)

What underlies the logics of the Pangymnastikon, the modern Suspension Trainer and the Power Plate, then, is the idea that the body can be approached as a whole and in a minimal physical space. The body is addressed from different angles and every muscle is given full play. Most gym equipment is concerned with the perfect position the body, the right amount of repetitions, the accurate lifting of weights and the exact posture. There is a sense that machines were scientifically tested to offer the best results possible.

The fitness club chain Curves is perhaps the best example of this 'scientific' approach to training in gyms. Exercise at this women-only gym contains an exact 30 minute circuit training which is completed on twelve machines and 'recovery squares' in between (O'Toole, 2008). The participant is given 35 seconds to complete one exercise after which either an instructor or a taped voice tells her to change stations. Every 'useless' movement during and in-between exercise is abandoned here; activities that interfere with the flow of the exercise are to a great extent suspended. Supervision of physical tasks by a digital voice, minute

regulation of activities, prescribed rhythm and pace of movements and meticulously well-thought out structure of gym equipment delimit wanderings of the mind or conversations with the fellow gym mate. The club promises both weight and inch loss to women when practiced at least three times per week in conjunction with a suggested diet. Training at Curves is intended to be timesaving and highly efficient. On the club's homepage it is stated that "unlike traditional gym equipment that needs to be adjusted for each person and is typically sized for men, the Curves' hydraulic equipment was designed for women and tested by physiologists and biomedical engineers" (Curves International, 2007). The machine, in other words, is designed so well that it accommodates, and suits automatically to every user. There are monthly 'interventions' at Curves: Members are asked to 'weigh in' and have body fat and waistline of arms, waist, hips and thighs measured monthly. Progress is recorded in member files and most clubs have mechanisms to communicate favourable results of high achieving clients to others, for example, on a black board at the entrance. A computerized check-in system reads members' key-cards, welcomes them with information on how many workouts they have completed during the month, and reminds them if it is time to weigh in and be measured again (O'Toole, 2008). What is encouraged is a micro-managerial approach to the exercising body combined with a scientific rhetoric. The Curves employment of scientific discourse goes further than the place's material features though. The chain's homepage refers to a list of academic research papers on the efficiency of the Curves programme (e.g. Farris, 2006). Using statistical methods, medical terms and an academic writing style, they appear far more sophisticated than promotional material published by other gyms. Curves' research papers usually discuss the efficiency of the programme for different populations. Their results provide guidelines for exercising or eating habits or simply describe the mean of the maximal heart rate or calories spent during a session. Although it is questionable whether participants actually read those papers (some being over 70 pages long), the very fact that these experiments have been conducted in the first place illustrates the gym's ambition to count as valid and trustworthy.

What can be inferred from the working principles of the weight machines in terms of how the body is being problematized?[15] On the one hand, their materiality suggests that the body consists of topographically identifiable parts of which each needs particular attention. By the same token, the geometrical dispersion of the machines on the gym floor invites gym users to work through the 'anatomical atlas' of their bodies in sequence. On the other hand, some devices such as the Power Plate and the Suspension Trainer propagate that the body needs to be addressed as a whole. There are, then, two conflicting conceptualizations of the body that ask for distinct material practices.

5.7 Conclusion

The data analysis, and here especially the analysis of the gym machine, has shown that the fitness site is underpinned by a discourse of self-improvement through what is considered as a scientific, effective and productive way of exercise. This discourse coincides with gym users' subjective perception that the gym yields an increase in everyday effectiveness, productivity and control. What is common in all exercise equipment is a minute and precise utilisation, and management of bodily forces. The calibrations, calorie counts, heart rate measures, repetitions and so on reveal one of the gym's most significant logics, namely the utilization of optimum forces to effect self-improvement – a process that requires disciplining of bodies and minds and calls for the micro-management of movements, self-evaluating practices and self-rectification. Training at the gym, in other words, encourages a form of discipline that is directed towards the self. As Foucault writes:

> He (sic) who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. (Foucault, 1995, p. 202-203)

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[15] By 'problematization' I refer to the process that renders something as 'problematic' in a sense that it allows for an evaluation and a set of experiences stemming from this evaluation (Rose & Miller, 2008)

Gym members are complicit in the process of the disciplining their bodies; they learn how to normalize themselves according to given calibrations. This form of discipline elicits and fosters participants' sense of accomplishment and gratification. Although self-disciplined behaviour is certainly required it is not an end for itself at the gym. It is more than a self-policing ethos that structures the gym, and this is where my analysis differs from Foucault's. Whereas in Foucault, it is self-policing subjectivity that is being produced through institutional practices, the gym establishes a self-monitoring and self-coaching relation to the self. What is paramount at the gym, as I would argue, are then discourses of self-mastery and self-improvement and, with them, the production positive affects related to self-accomplishment.

As shown in the first part of this chapter, the gym is closely linked to everyday life in general, and work life in particular where in some cases, gym exercise is even being prioritized over work. Facilitated by the generous temporal and spatial availability the gym becomes even the core of some members' day. All participants take up a type of discourse that advocates the psychological benefits of gym training. Participants agree on the positive effects gym exercise has on their day, their life and in some cases even on their personality. The gym is conceptualized as what might be called 'rehearsal' for life: participants believe that gym helps them to tackle demanding or emotionally challenging life situations more successfully, that they will gain psychological resilience. Interestingly, one can observe that the self-management strategies at the gym are almost infinite; once one starting to self-manage his or her own performances, bodily functions, behaviours etc. one can individualize, compartmentalize, map, 'invent' always more and smaller aspects of the self to manage. One may speculate what other forms of technologies of selfhood may be invented in future, not just in terms of body and fitness but perhaps also in terms of cognitive capabilities or interpersonal relationships. The 'quantified self' movement is perhaps the beginning of such a trend. The recent increase in the use of digital self-tracking devices within the 'quantified self movement' takes this logic to its extreme: little detectors track what one eats, how one sleeps, how often one exercises, which friends one meets, how often one calls one's parents or goes for a walk with one's dog, what books one reads and which emotions and physical

reactions during these activities occur. These activities are then transformed into digital data, which are uploaded to servers and allow users to analyse their progress and share their information with other users (Till, 2014). As Lupton (2013) argues, the 'quantified self movement' might be said to be an expression of neoliberal entrepreneurialism, celebrating self-maximisation and promoting self-critique through the presentation of "objective" measures of performance. To produce data about one's self, to 'know' one's self better and eventually to improve seems to be one of the core tenets of contemporary society.

Whilst this chapter focused on how discourses are produced by and through the materiality of gym equipment and on how these discourses find resonance in participants' sense of self, the following chapter looks at the inter- and transactional dynamics between trainers and trainees.

6

The 'personalization' of gym exercise: individualizing and homogenising practices

This chapter is devoted to the relational dynamics between gym participants and their fitness trainers. I am concerned with the ways in which participants and trainers position themselves and relate to each other during face-to-face interactions. To accomplish this, I concentrate on two encounters that are indicative of the various ways in which relationships between members and trainers are organised at the gym. In the first part of this chapter I explore the ways in which different subject positions are negotiated and sustained during the induction, which is typically the initial encounter between participants and trainers. My analysis shows that the induction is discursively framed in a three-fold way in which the trainees are positioned as customers, patients and members. In the second part of this chapter I focus on personal training as a continuation and intensification, but also a contradiction, to the medical and economic modes of interacting that were identified so far. I suggest here that the reciprocal affective bond between trainer and trainees has individualizing effects in a double-sense: first, it renders the trainer-trainee relationship an intimate encounter that is nonetheless marked by what might be called an 'optimal distance', and second, it conceptualizes the self of the trainee as unique and individual, requiring personalized care and attention.

6.1 Getting to know the gym and yourself

After new members sign up for a gym membership the first encounter with a member of staff typically takes place during the induction. In most fitness clubs the induction is a compulsory one-to-one meeting that takes about 45 minutes to an hour. The purpose is to familiarize new members with the safe use of the equipment and to generate an individual training schedule for the participant to work with. In short, after an initial interview with the new member where fitness aims are identified the trainer designs a schedule set of exercises, determining the proper equipment, resistance, frequency and repetition. As I have argued in Chapter 5, the schedule-led training program suggests, and 'promises', that there

is an optimal, rational and systematized way of working on the body. If we look closer, we can see that this encounter also has the crucial discursive function of establishing certain subject-positions for participants and trainers.
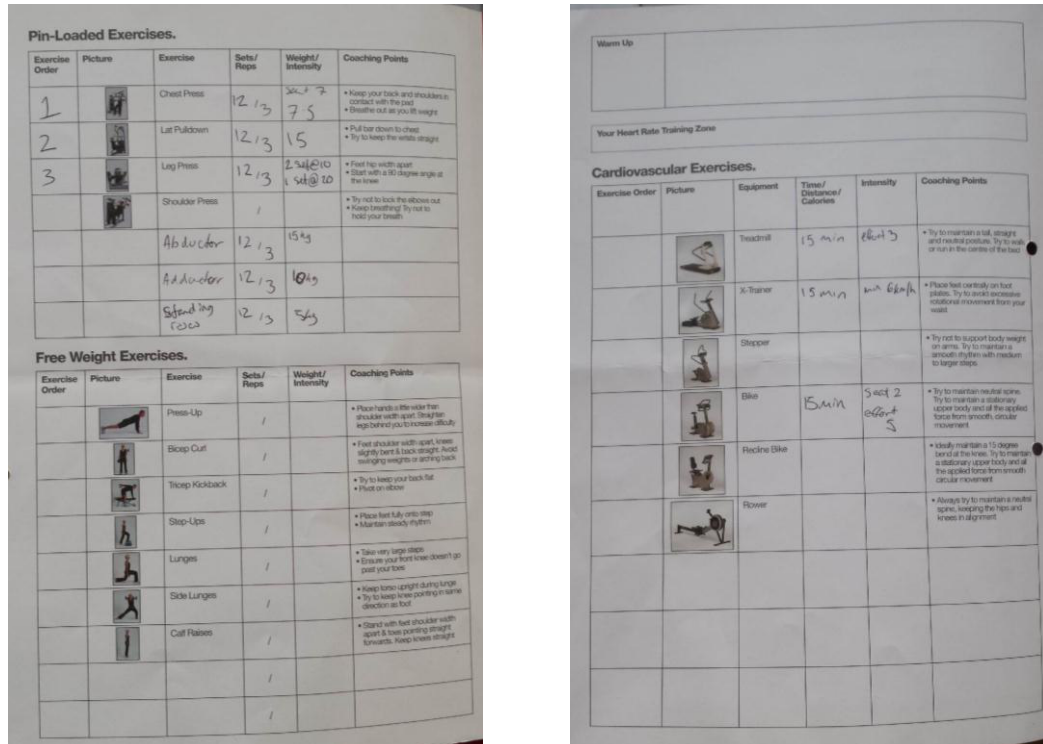
Figure 7 My training schedule at LA Fitness

Shifting positions: being a customer, member and a patient

In every gym I visited as a participant observant I was asked to make an appointment for the induction immediately after I had signed up. This service was always free of charge and highly recommended by the members of staff. When I failed to make an appointment at LA Fitness, for example, the receptionist reminded me of the induction rather assertively during my first visit and was very keen to arrange a date right away. The following fieldwork entry reflects how I experienced the first few minutes of the induction at LA Fitness:

> *After meeting Sarah at the reception desk, I was taken to what was called the 'consultation room' on the first floor of the building, just above the gym floor. The room had a desk behind which Sarah took a seat. She asked me to take a seat on the other side of the desk. The place looked like a standard office with a computer, book shelves and drawers out of birchwood. A bit dull really: no*

books, no pictures on the walls. A deserted office. But it didn't feel like a proper business meeting (although I've never been to one..), more what I would consider as a consultation. There were a few instruments and devices I could not make sense of but I was sort of expecting that these may be used on me. (field notes, LA Fitness, *19.10.2011)*

Due to the spatial arrangement of the room – the office furniture and the large desk between me and the trainer – I felt very much like a client who is about to *consult* an expert. The fact that one of Sarah's first questions was about what I wanted to achieve at LA Fitness together with her constant note taking strengthened my impression that this was about *me*, my needs and my goals. I was expecting that at the end of the induction I would receive an individualized programme and hoped that it would be just right for me. I was thus more than happy to candidly provide all the information I was asked for. It should be noted that at the time I perceived the office layout as rather grotesque. Although the wooden shelves added a certain sobriety to the atmosphere, the fact that the desk and shelves were almost empty created a bizarre feeling, as if the induction were instead a performance, the acting out of a two person play on the stage. The *interpretative frame* of the situation was ambivalent. To recall, according to Goffman's (1974) primary reading of a scene, the interpretative frame must immediately be decipherable for actors to familiarize themselves with their involvement in a particular setting. It is through the initial reading of the frame that participants know how to act and not to act, what to say and not to say, and how to be and not to be. The spatial layout of the office and the questionnaire Sarah and I worked through qualified the situation as akin to a consultation, and consequently I behaved in a way that might have been expected of clients who expect to be consulted, readily providing information about my health, my past exercise history and fitness goals. However, the very fact that the 'stage design', the furniture and décor, were not entirely sophisticated and consistent (e.g. lack of books and other office supplies) yielded a rupture in my reading of the interpretative frame. Also, Sarah's 'script' I perceived to open up multiple 'roles'. For most of the time she had a sober demeanour, being patient and perceptive. But she had a captivating manner, too. Her energetic gestures and tone of voice somehow indicated that she was keen to motivate me, promoting gym training as the ultimate method to stay fit and healthy. She reassured me, for

example, and despite my unconcealed scepticism, that it was absolutely realistic and doable to lose eight kilogrammes in three months. Here, I certainly felt like a customer.

It can be said that due to its club-like and yet commercial character, the gym has a double, intertwined task in positioning its participants. On the one hand, they are handled as customers who pay for a service. On the other hand, they are made to feel like members who belong to a particular club. Through purely economic lenses, the gym participant is a customer who is bound to a legal contract which defines the terms, conditions, scope and costs of the services she receives. Although I did not assume the role of customer throughout the induction with Sarah there were elements reminiscent of a sales conversation (e.g. her extraordinary enthusiasm). There was a perceived shift in my positioning during the conversation when Sarah asked more personal questions and even commented on my answers with what I understood to be genuine interest. When I said that I was a PhD student, for example, she immediately told me that her younger brother was pursuing a psychology degree and was very much interested in motivational psychology.[1] And although I was aware of the fact that engaging customers in more personal conversations is a common strategy in the service industry I started to feel less like a customer. The personal elements in our talk and its informality gave the impression that Sarah's words were a sincere expression of her mind. I understood her questions to be an attempt to connect with me on more than a professional level. Through Sarah's efforts to relate to me personally, I started feeling more 'at home' at LA Fitness, perhaps more as a member than a customer or service-recipient. Retrospectively, Sarah's shared story about her brother's degree and his favourite subject would seem to have been crucial in this regard. The connection I started to experience went beyond Sarah as a person or a trainer, however. Given that I perceived her as a representative of the gym, I started to

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[1] I was very careful not to talk about my PhD topic in this encounter and indeed managed to divert the topic just at the right moment. Concealing the fact that I was a researcher and not 'only' a gym participant certainly raises ethical issues: As discussed in Chapter 4 on methodology, covert participant observation transgresses the principle of informed consent and by remaining partially incognito the researcher also employs a certain level of deceit (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Indeed, I did sometimes feel discomfort in my role as a researcher as I was only partially honest with Sarah. In this particular case, however, I did not anticipate that being silent about my true intentions would cause any harm or injury to Sarah. By the same token, it consoled me to think that I have never actually lied to her but rather withheld information relating to my doctoral research.

feel a sense of belonging to the fitness club as an institution. It should be noted that there is a sense amongst participants that the gym does not allow for much sociability or a feeling of belonging. As I will show in Chapter 7, most gym members perceive their fellow participants as 'anonymous others'. However, in their advertisements gyms seek to promote an opposite sentiment by referring to their participants as 'members', and not as 'customers' or 'clients', and thus foregrounding the locale's social character. Fitness First, for example, has established a special day, 'Fitness Friday', when members are allowed to bring a friend to the club:

> *Join Fitness First and you're joining a club. A club to be proud of…Our fitness team will inspire and motivate you to reach your goals…You can bring a friend to workout with you for free every single Friday, as part of our Fitness Friday. (Fitness First, n.d.)*

Three issues are being emphasized in this short extract: firstly, the gym is qualified as a *club*. This invokes feelings of group membership and, as explicitly stated, a sense of pride ("A club to be proud of"), stemming from belonging there. Secondly, the notion of a fitness *team* elicits feeling of togetherness and mutuality. The staff is not referred to as a group of experts or professionals but as a team to emphasize the social relations between employees. As Fairclough (2001) writes, 'team' is one of the words that is regularly used by the new management discourse to denote flexibility, collegiality, expertise and lack of hierarchies. Working with and in a 'team' is supposedly to indicate that gym participants are not treated as mere customers or clients but equal partners that are taken care of by a group of experts. Thirdly, the opportunity to bring a friend to the gym on a particular day of the week free of charge can be understood as an attempt to downplay the gym's economic interests. The implicit message is that Fitness First is not primarily oriented towards business but sociability and leisure. That Fridays typically mark the beginning of the weekend and are generally associated with after-work activities, social gatherings and relaxation is then perhaps not a coincidence (Areni, 2008). Whilst middle-ranged fitness clubs such as Fitness First, LA Fitness or Virgin Active tend to qualify their participants as members and not as economic actors, the low-budget club *Pure Gym* repeatedly stresses its good value

for money. In the 'membership feedback' section of the club's website, for example, most comments praise the gym for its low membership fees and extraordinary services (PureGym, n.d.). Examples include:

> *Ridiculously low price for the services and facility you get here. It was that cheap that I also have Personal Training now…*
>
> ---
>
> *I think I've been to about every gym in Edinburgh, and in the end it was easy to choose Pure Gym, as all the rest have stupidly high joining fees, are far too expensive per month, and often don't have a good selection of machines, so it's great to see a gym with such a no nonsense approach and a realistic price tag.*
>
> ---
>
> *Clean, friendly, great atmosphere and VERY cheap for what is on offer to you. Also the general upkeep of the gym is great. There is rarely a broken machine, always clean and I always feel that there is a great pro-active management behind the gym.*

That Pure Gym assumes its members to be financial actors whose interests are concentrated on low prices and good value for money was also reflected in the initial club-tour I attended there. In contrast to the induction at LA Fitness during which the economic exchange was only implied but not accentuated, the club-tour at Pure Gym was characterized through repeated references to the low membership fees and no-contract policy. Hence, one can say that gym goers are not consistently positioned as customers or members but the subject positions vary across gyms and, as illustrated above, even within one single interaction such as at the induction.

The 'medical' examination

One vital aspect of the induction is the more or less obligatory health and fitness assessment that new members undergo. Although one can in principal reject this assessment, trainers do not present it as an optional part of the induction. In my experience, not many gyms carry out an in-depth or exhaustive physical examination. The three inductions I had in the course of this research project resembled very much a medical anamnestic investigation. In addition to questions

about occupation, eating, drinking and exercise habits I was interviewed about my own and my family's illness history, medication intake, pains or injuries. Like a doctor or nurse in the examination room, the trainer typed this information into a document and saved it on the computer without making much eye contact with me. The trainers seemed to act in highly scripted and routinized ways. Leidner (1993) writes that this scripted way of acting that is prevalent in the service industry may cause frustration amongst customers, who are likely to perceive staff as "pushy, unresponsive, stupid and robot-like" (Leidner, 1993, p.7).

At LA Fitness and The Park I was measured in various ways: weight and body mass index, resting heart rate, blood pressure, fat mass, cholesterol, sugar level, muscle mass and contours of the different body parts and tidal volume. Medical apparatuses such as the stethoscope or the sphygmomanometer[2] dominated the interaction at this stage. Again, very similar to a medical examination, the fitness instructors documented my results in silence whilst I was, almost inevitably, waiting for my 'diagnosis' to emerge from the data.

The employment of medical procedures, vocabularies and apparatuses are part of the same quasi-scientific discursive strategy that has been discussed in Chapter 5. Consequently, participants are positioned as 'patients' whilst trainers are automatically positioned as medical experts who have the power to diagnose and to prescribe, perhaps not a drug, but a fitness programme that functions as remedy. As one inner-city fitness club states on its website, the induction is an "in-depth assessment of your general health, based on a series of checks and tests that we carry out to determine what we refer to as your 'health score'" (Nuffield Health, n.d.). The score the participant is given is a figure between six and one hundred. It is then not surprising to see why the induction may be an event that some participants find intimidating. Measurements are never neutral but entail a moment of evaluation and judgement. On the other hand, health scores can be reassuring and perceived as a relief. Boris tells me about his rather positive experience:

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[2] A stethoscope is a medical tool that enables to hear the internal sounds of the human body such as the heartbeat. A sphygmomanometer is a device for measuring blood pressure.

Boris: I took the MOT, I don't know what it stands for but it's that health examination[3], and they encourage you to be healthy. They measured whatever, whatever, blood sugar, pressure, weight ratio. It was quite complex and I got a sheet of paper. I am apparently quite healthy, it's amazing. The thing is, I scored 79. And 80 would have been the top 20% of the male population of my age which means either in Great Britain people are very bad in terms of health [laughing], or-. I felt good then. The thing that didn't work was, they took, they put a machine on I think it was about breathing and the capacity like the volume whatever. And apparently that's what gets better when you exercise more.

What is interesting about the medical assessment is that although participants are measured in many different ways, the results remain vague. Boris, for example, is told that his tidal volume is not optimal but that it will get better once he starts exercising. He is not told, however, to what extent his tidal volume should increase and what the health benefits are supposed to be. To give another example, my blood pressure was above average on two occasions and I was told that weight loss and exercise would help. It seemed to me that it all came down to "If you work-out at the gym regularly your health scores will go up". This, of course, is not unexpected advice to receive in a gym context given that the club is interested in encouraging regular attendance. At the same time this statement substantiates the quasi-medical discourse the gym employs: Precisely because of the seeming complexity and 'medicalization' of the fitness assessment and because the trainer does not explain, (or even know herself?) the implications of the results in detail, the encounter cultivates a quasi-medical atmosphere.

6.2 Promoting activity and self-responsibility

To sum up, The MOT score system Nuffield Health uses can be understood as a pragmatic way to sustain regular attendance and to cultivate a quasi-scientific aura. However, the use of MOT scores has a set of other functions, too. Firstly, and most obviously, by offering a medical examination the gym foregrounds the health aspects of exercise. By doing so, the gym establishes a certain definition of 'health', namely health as a quantifiable entity, as a feature of the client,

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[3] As a non-native speaker, Boris is not familiar with the "MOT" as a term used in the UK to refer to a full-body medical exam. MOT stands for Ministry of Transport test. It's a legally prescribed test that assesses the road worthiness of motor vehicles but it is sometimes used colloquially to describe other check-ups, such as medical examinations.

something that can be looked at from the outside (e.g. with the trainer), operationalized (e.g. through tests) and controlled (e.g. though exercise and diet). Health, in short, is portrayed as something that can be actively *acquired*. As I have briefly stated in the previous chapter, this portrait is in line with the neoliberal, post-welfare conceptualizations of health (Crawford, 1980, 2006; Lupton 2003). As Dean (1995) writes, a key agenda of neoliberal technologies is to increase the number of active and self-reliant citizens and to decrease the number of those who are dependent on the state and on others. It can be argued that fitness and health assessments at gyms speak directly to such a neoliberal agenda. When trainers motivate members to take responsibility for their own physical strength (e.g. by suggesting increasing their MOT scores) they frame health as a feature of the self that individuals can and should responsibly manage. Taking on responsibility for one's health has a normative and moral impetus, too, for lack of health "clashes too uncomfortably with the image of the 'good citizen' as someone who actively participates in social and economic life, makes rational choices and is independent, self-reliant and responsible" (Galvin, 2002, p. 107). Since health promoting behaviour is enmeshed in discourses of moral responsibility, exercise – and indeed gym membership – can be considered to be 'honourable' choices.

How morality and exercise are interlinked is reflected in Condrad's (1994) empirical research, too: a qualitative analysis of 54 semi-structured interviews, this research suggests that, alongside weight and nutrition, exercise behaviour is over-determined by moral statements that declare certain habits as good and others as bad. Fitness participants constantly negotiate the 'good' and the 'bad', seeking to reaffirm themselves as virtuous agents by doing the 'right' exercises and eating the 'right' things. One can argue here that the quest for rightness goes hand in hand with the abovementioned (neoliberal) desire to become a self-reliant, independent and responsible subject that Dean (1995) and Galvin (2002) describe: as sickness is associated with issues of dependency (dependency on others and on the state), and as dependency is presented as undesirable according to the neoliberal idea of the free-market productive individual, lack of health is associated with moral failure. The individual *could* have employed healthy behaviour but chose not to, is the main logic here. Signing up for a gym

membership, then, can be said to mark the beginning of an active life in which subjects start taking action in the name of their health.

Designing an action plan

The health and fitness assessment usually ends with some sort of evaluation. At LA Fitness, Sarah went through some of my results and told me that my body fat was too high but my muscle mass ratio was actually within the normal range. As I had identified weight loss as my primary aim, I was assigned to the *Trim* category. Here, I learnt that LA Fitness divides the gym goer into four different types: *Trim*, *Tone*, *Train* and *Fit*. *Trim* is a category that the member falls under if her principal aim is to lose weight. *Tone* is the label for those participants who want to train their muscles. *Train* is designated for people who are working towards a goal outside the gym environment. This can be preparation for a marathon or improvement of skills in another sport the member pursues. Finally, *Fit* is an overarching category to describe those members who wish to improve their overall health and fitness without a clear-cut goal. Every new member is classified under one single category. Although members are assigned to a broad category – that is, although they are grouped together – they also receive an individual, personalized training schedule. This schedule is printed on a sheet of paper where the colour of the paper explicitly denotes which of the four categories the participant belongs to (see figure 12). Surely, the *Trim-Tone-Train-Fit* system has pragmatic benefits, such as allowing members to navigate through the class timetable more easily. However, I would argue that its main function is to provide a *grid of intelligibility*. The label under which one trains attaches an explicit *meaning* and *purpose* to the training and defines one's 'gym identity'. Participants not only get to understand that working towards an end is a governing principle at the gym: the categories make gym participants direct their focus and behaviour in certain ways. Once my ultimate goal to lose weight was materialized in the red training schedule, for example, I knew where to locate my body in the gym: namely, mostly near the cardio machines and in Step and Aerobic classes. A member of the group *Tone,* on the other hand, would spend more time near the strength machines and follow classes such as Body Pump or Box Fit.

The labels LA Fitness attaches to its clients can be seen as part of a discursive strategy that motivates participants not only to self-define in terms of the four categories but, by doing so, to inhabit certain physical spaces on the gym floor and to avoid others. The distribution of bodies in institutional space inevitably reminds us of Foucault's oft-cited observations in *Discipline and Punish*, where he writes that partitioning is a vital element of disciplinary power:

> Each individual has his own place; and each place its individual. Avoid distributions in groups; break up collective dispositions; analyse confused, massive or transient pluralities. Disciplinary space tends to be divided into as many sections as there are bodies or elements to be distributed. One must eliminate the effects of imprecise distributions, the uncontrolled disappearance of individuals, their diffuse circulation, their unusable and dangerous coagulation…to supervise the conduct, of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits. It was [is] a procedure, therefore, aimed at knowing, mastering and using. Discipline organizes an analytical space. (Foucault, 1995, p.143)

There are several points to be made here: first, whilst in 'conventional' disciplinary institutions such as prisons and hospitals partitioning is an explicit and intentional tactic to manage inmates, the distribution of bodies in gyms is accomplished through a detour. Fitness participants are not placed in space by someone else but they allocate themselves according to a *savoir-faire* that they acquire at the gym over time. My observations suggest that although some participants follow the training schedules that fitness trainers design for them, most members create, sooner or later, their own, alternative, 'road maps' through the gym. Participants are rarely fixed in space but, on the contrary, they extend their use of space once they have familiarized themselves with the setting and the main principles of working-out. Hence, one can assume that categories such as *Trim-Tone-Train-Fit* lose their importance once participants start to develop their own gym identities. Secondly, the gym's discursive strategies differ from the institutions Foucault has in mind, in the sense that space at the gym is not "divided into as many sections as there are bodies or elements to be distributed" but, as I would argue, quite the reverse: body-categories emerge through the allocation of bodies in space. It is through methods such as the *Train-Trim-Tone-*

Fit scheme or the MOT that participants come to subjectivize their goals. In this sense, the different areas on the gym floor can be seen as providing an analytic grid where by locating themselves within this grid, members adopt certain fitness-identity-categories ("I am a person who wants to get bigger etc.).

As I have hinted above, there is room for mobility within these analytical grids, for they are not mutually exclusive. In my own case, I started my gym career as a 'Trim-person', concentrating on long, sweaty cardio work-outs and a low-carb diet. In my last year of research I began to do more strength exercises, eating more protein bars and starting to drink shakes – practices associated with the category of 'Tone'. My use of space at the gym, in other words, changed drastically. I discovered corners of the fitness site that I had previously overlooked: I started using free weights and watching other people doing push-ups and squats. I spent more time in front of the mirrors admiring, evaluating and comparing my arms and legs to the other women nearby. I started participating in mixed-gender strength classes. In sum, I started observing, interacting with, comparing and presenting myself to a different sub-population than I did hitherto. By changing my spatial co-ordinates my *sense of self* underwent changes, too.

I have illustrated above that the induction is a seminal event for the new gym member in several ways. For one, it is a transitory space in which one's sense of self *qua* gym member begins to take shape. The fitness and health assessment as well as the personalized training schedule promote the idea of individuality and uniqueness, which, in a way, stands in contrast to the idea of sociability and community that is likewise prevalent at gyms. Also, the induction is typically the first, and perhaps last, long one-to-one encounter between trainers and trainees. Unless members sign up for personal training, their interaction with staff remains rather rudimentary. To understand which discourses encourage participants to engage in a long-term working relationship with one particular member of staff, the focus of the chapter's second part will be on personal training.

6.3 Personalizing the training

Personal trainers are fitness instructors who work with individual clients on a one-to-one basis, either at the gym, outdoors or in the client's homes.[4] In the 1980s, when fitness gyms started to become popular, personal training (PT henceforth) was regarded as an elite pursuit, a service that was used by corporate executives and other upper-class professionals. However, over the last few decades PT has become a vital part of the fitness landscape, both inside and outside the UK (Frew & McGillivray, 2005; Harvey et al., 2013; Smith-Maguire, 2008). As Smith-Maguire (2008) writes, in the US personal fitness training was promoted as a lifestyle choice in the 1980s, not only for Hollywood stars and business people but for those who aspired to the way of life that was associated with glamour and affluence. The increase of personal trainers over the past three decades led to growing competition on the market and as a consequence the hourly rate of PT has decreased, becoming affordable to members of the middle class. This trend towards a 'personalization' of fitness services was also confirmed by my analysis. Almost every gym I have visited offered PT sessions against an extra fee that ranged from £40 to £100 an hour. As accounts from members confirm, clients may work out with a personal trainer on a regular basis or on one or a few occasions, for example when they wish to be introduced to new exercises or to modify their training schedule. But in which discourses is PT anchored and to what extent is it a 'personal' pursuit? To grapple with these questions, it is useful to look at how PT is advertised.

Advertising the 'personal'

Personal trainers typically work on a self-employed basis and are paid at an hourly rate. Advertising consequently has a pivotal role in this sector. During my participant observation I could identify three common strategies to promote PT: first, gyms place large panels near the entrance where the particular location guarantees an increased visibility. Second, most gyms' websites rigorously announce the availability of PT and third, trainers themselves approach potential clients on the gym floor by starting a conversation with them. In the following, I

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[4] There are studios that offer exclusively personal training (e.g. Matt Roberts in London) as well as so-called 'mobile personal trainers' who come to clients' houses. As the focus of my thesis is the 'conventional' gym setting these other forms of personal training will not be discussed further.

would like to focus on printed advertisements. The linguistic and visual rhetoric used here helps us to understand the implications of the notion of the 'personal'.
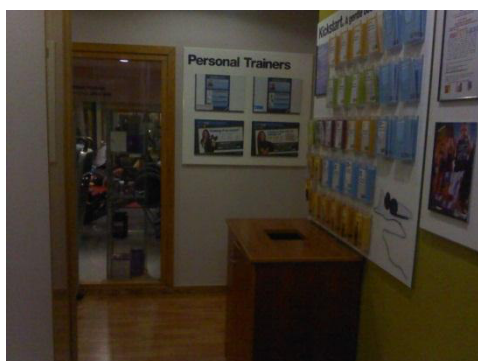
Figure 8 Personal Training advertisement at LA Fitness Golders Green, by the author
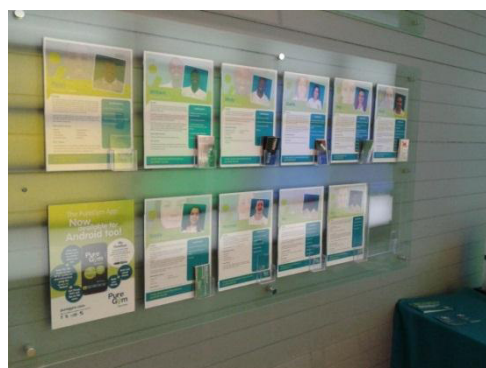
Figure 9 Personal Training, advertisement at PureGym, Holloway, by the author

A frequently employed rhetorical strategy in PT advertisements is to present the text as a narrative told by the trainer her or himself. By giving a voice to the trainer the reader is immediately driven into a form of dialogue. This establishes a set of expectations about what personal training might involve in general, namely not only an individualized exercise programme but also an individual, unique person as a trainer. Some adverts are structured like a curriculum vitae, including a list of the trainer's various degrees and certificates, which functions as evidence of the trainer's professionalism and expertise. According to these 'CVs' most trainers are not only fitness instructors but also physiotherapists, nutritionists or sport massagers. Clients are therefore invited to choose their trainers to suit their needs, almost as if they were choosing employees for a project. Leaflets also mention the trainer's past athletic achievements (e.g. the accomplishment of well-known marathons, triathlons and other sport events) – a form of evidence is thereby provided that the member of staff in question is determined and successful in their field of expertise. The client, then, is introduced to a personal trainer who is less an interchangeable service provider and more a person with a history.

Building upon Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of the forms of capital, Smith-Maguire (2008) suggests that personal trainers' credibility is based on three forms of capital: first, intellectual capital of certifications and technical know-how; second,

social capital such as relationships and 'interpersonal skills'; third, physical capital, that is, a tight and toned body that looks healthy and fit. The fit body literally embodies "the ethos of the fitness field, the body's status as a site of investment, a form of capital, and an expression of self nowhere better illustrated than in the figure of the personal trainer" (Smith-Maguire 2008, p. 148). Indeed, appearance and 'aesthetic labour' have been acknowledged as important factors of many frontline service jobs (Leidner, 1993, 1999; Harvey et al., 2013). This is why it is surprising that PT flyers rarely depict the full body of a personal trainer but only the portrait or the upper part of the trainer. I observed this minimal visibility and attention to the trainer's fit body also in the field: in all three gyms personal trainers typically wear unitary T-shirts with the club's corporate emblem and long tracksuit trousers. These T-Shirts are plain-coloured and not particularly well-fitted or revealing so that the outfit does not particularly highlight the trainer's physique. Given that one of the main aspirations of potential clients is a fit and well-shaped body one might expect promoters to try to convince clients by encouraging them to compare their bodies with those of personal trainers. What better proof of expertise and trustworthiness would there be than the portrayal of a trained, muscular body as a 'form of capital' that is worth investing in? One of the reasons why bodies might be omitted from most PT posters is that promoters may not want to cause discomfort amongst gym users by showing them bodies that clients could find unrealistic to achieve. One can hypothesize that the sight of the perfectly fit body could mobilize 'bad feelings' such as discomfort about one's own physicality, athletic insufficiency, impaired health etc. The adverts' aim, then, could be to transmit enthusiasm, motivation and curiosity without allowing for negative feelings to emerge. Another reason could be that the intellectual capital, that is, academic and professional education, are foregrounded to produce seriousness and credibility. This is also echoed in George's (2008) empirical research on PT, in which trainers acknowledged but at the same time downplayed the importance of appearance. Instead, in interviews they highlighted certification and technical know-how as a sign of expertise and professionalism. Interestingly, though, in my study both informal and formal conversations with gym goers suggest that that most are not familiar with the qualifications and organizational bodies that are listed in adverts. Indeed, there is a wide range of bodies in the UK where fitness trainers can obtain a professional qualification. Whilst they vary in

reputation, fees and length of training the conventional gym member is unlikely to assess these different institutions.

The use of personal pronouns 'I', 'you' and 'we' is another feature of PT advertisements. The use of personal pronouns 'you' and 'we' is, according to Fairclough (1989), typical of mass media messages. The aim is to attain what he calls 'synthetic personalisation'. Synthetic personalization is "a compensatory tendency to give the impression of treating each of the people 'handled' *en masse* as an individual" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 62) at the same time. What this rhetorical strategy does is to contribute to a certain level of ambiguity in which clients are likely to feel interpellated as individuals and, at the same time, anonymous because the advert targets a larger group. The pronoun 'you' in this advert, for example, easily allows the recipient of the message to identify with the position of a potential client as a 'private' individual. Exclamations such as "Time working with you is about YOU" and "Your mission is my mission" indicate that the client is at the centre, and in control, of this service whilst the statement "together we will succeed" suggests a coaching-like relationship, a working relationship based on mutuality. What this statement also does is to treat the self a project to be worked upon, a kind of self-referential enterprise.

Thus, the notion of 'personal' opens up multiple avenues of reference. Firstly, it suggests that the PT work-out – in contrast to the otherwise pre-given and standardized nature of most gym exercise – is unique and special in the sense that it is different from what might be considered as exercise for the 'masses'. On another level, the notion 'personal' can be said to be a marker of ownership. For the time of the session, the trainer is, if not 'owned', but certainly hired by the one client; the trainer works exclusively for him or her and must not be shared with others. What follows is a sense of entitlement, also echoed in the phrase "*my* personal trainer", a phrase all respondents in my study have used as opposed to "*the* personal trainer". To some extent, one can say that the idea of the 'personal' stands in contrast to the gym's *totalizing* working principles as they were discussed in the preceding chapter. If we remember, the gym promotes itself as a place that is valuable for *everyone*, regardless of participants' level of fitness or physical abilities. The equipment is standardized and yet adaptable to the

individual user whilst its execution is ultimately more or less prescriptive. The group exercise is even more 'restrictive' in the sense that its main principle is the rigorous imitation, or reproduction, of movements. Through PT, on the other hand, fitness members receive a tailor-made programme that is open for change and variation in a face-to-face encounter where the trainer can be consulted immediately.

6.4 Inadequacy as a driving force

The answers I have received when I inquired about fitness participants' decision to hire a personal trainer were two-fold: all respondents said that they perceived an inadequacy of their own athletic abilities and felt exercise with the gym equipment was simply insufficient. Typical responses for the latter case were "I wasn't getting any fitter" or "I had reached a plateau, I wasn't shifting anywhere". Participants had the wish to go beyond the common gym training by taking up an alternative, or more precisely, a *supplementary* work-out regime, most participants doing other gym exercises alongside their PT sessions. This resonates in the promotional material where PT is advertised as a practice to be accomplished in addition to, rather than instead of, other gym exercises. LA Fitness, for example, writes:

> *100% committed to looking and feeling great? We don't expect you to sign up and just let you get on with it. You owe it to yourself to get a personal trainer if you want to reach your goals faster, stay committed and work harder. With the personalised guidance from our highly qualified PTs, you can push yourself further than you ever thought you could. It's also a great way to make your gym sessions more efficient, giving you better value for your money. So what are you waiting for?(LA Fitness, n.d.)*

The extract above implies that conventional gym training may be sufficient for those members who are not entirely ("100%") committed to their fitness regime but that it is certainly not enough for those who are more devoted. The advert argues that if one takes the gym seriously, it would be better to hire a PT, as an act of commitment and a show of willingness to work harder than one hitherto has. With the words "you can push yourself further than you ever thought you could") the advertisement anticipates a potential scenario by demonstrating an awareness

of the frustration gym training may provoke. I have suggested in Chapter 5 that one of the key driving forces behind a long-term gym membership is the constant longing for self-improvement. One can say that the advert above draws on this very discourse, in which working on the body is a desirable but never-ending project. The advert also mobilizes concerns about the gym work-out such as not getting the results one hopes for ("make your gym sessions more efficient"). PT is presented almost as a logical consequence: If working out with a personal trainer is more efficient and therefore time-saving, as it is claimed in all adverts, there is hardly a reason why one should not sign up for private fitness sessions ("So what are you waiting for?").

Training for the trainer

One often-used strategy I observed in the field to encourage motivation is to remind the client of his or her own goals ("You want to get these pounds off"). Another strategy is to recapitulate how far he or she has come ("You have managed three sets last time, today we'll go for four sets."). However, I got the impression that clients were not be pushed too hard and that there was a balance between lenience and rigour. However, that this balance is not always achieved is reflected in my interviews where participants have reported occasions in which their trainers failed to appreciate that they may not have had the same aspirations and abilities. Jennifer (age 42, researcher), who used personal training in the past but eventually decided to stop, explains:

> *Jennifer: They [personal trainers] seem to want to arrive at where they are and the conversation seems to be 'you must do this', 'you must push yourself'. I can push myself hard enough and I am not in this big competition in life. And this feeling I have always had with them was 'work harder', 'work faster', 'push more'. I just want to get to this level. It might not be hugely ambitious but I'm ok with that. And I didn't like the fact that they were always like. 'C'mon I can do this, I can do this.' And you are like, 'ok but I'm not you'.*

One can clearly feel the discomfort and tension that Jennifer must have felt during her sessions. She refers to the unwritten rule that as a client one cannot simply refuse to "listen" to the personal trainer. This somehow runs counter to the idea

that personal training is about self-identified goals. It is worth quoting Jennifer a little further:

> *Jennifer: I am also not very proud of me in that sense and I always think the personal trainer could think 'Who you are kidding?" It's just too intense…Yes, they might be thinking "You are not really trying". There is a sense of disappointment. You are not just training to be fit but you're training to make sure that you don't disappoint them. They do play on that. But I am not really interested in pleasing you.*

Although the ways in which trainers instruct their clients, namely in a motivational and friendly way, carefully and almost strategically where an overtly judgemental tone is being avoided, the one-to-one setting of PT with the client always being on the spot clearly creates a pressure on Jennifer. She feels the need to live up to her trainer's expectations so that she ends up performing for her trainer, trying to please and to avoid disappointment. Liz (age 34, accountant) has a similar experience. When she occasionally cancels a session or does not perform particularly well during training, she has "a sense that you let her down. It is like you haven't put in the work." One way to avoid this feeling, as Liz tells me, is to practice for the personal training session in advance:

> *Liz: So, I have personal training tomorrow and I am thinking which exercises am I practicing, have I done my practice for the day, those sort of things. I keep up with the exercises because I know I am going at 10 o'clock tomorrow I want to be able to do these exercises. I just want it to be enjoyable when I get there. And I know that when I practice during the week it's much more enjoyable when I do go.*

> *Ceren: Does your personal trainer give you exercises for home?*

> *Liz: I always get some homework. I actually quite like the homework. And she can tell whether I have done the work or not. I am also quite honest about it if I haven't done as much practice as I wanted to. Let's say, she says ok, I need you to do three sets of lunges twice a day. If I had a week where I couldn't do it twice a day. The other week, I have only managed to do one set a day and when I arrive I tell her that so that she knows. It requires some honesty on my part, there*

is no escape. Because when I get there I just know she is going to give me some
lunges and she is going to see whether I have been practicing or not (laughing).

One is inclined to think that the main reason Liz finds PT more enjoyable when she prepares for her sessions is that it proves her devotedness. She wants to perform well in front of her trainer to prove that she is committed and that she is taking PT seriously. The fact that she confesses when she has not done her 'homework' demonstrates the evaluative moment inherent to PT where one may ask whether trainees do not also perform and train for their trainers.

6.5 Keeping the optimal distance

As mentioned above, one of the reasons members decide to pay for a personal trainer is the idea that working out with someone can itself be more motivating than exercising on one's own. Whilst direct interactions between members and fitness instructors are rather rare during conventional gym sessions, personal trainers are entirely focussed on the performance of the client. Almost every motion of the client is being monitored, every effort is being recorded and every action is commented upon. There is, in other words, little escape from the gaze of the trainer. In turn, trainees are expected to follow directives and to allow themselves to be subjected to the trainer's scrutiny and instructions. On a website that is addressed to both trainers and trainees, the latter are encouraged "to listen" to the former:

> *Clients often begin a training program, and after failing to see results in the first*
> *week, decide to alter, tinker or ignore certain aspects of their program. What*
> *happens? No progress! A good client will listen, and take on the professional*
> *advice given to them, as opposed to modifying their plan to suit their own tastes.*
> *(Focus Training, 2012)[5]*

In this short extract, the trainer is positioned as the expert and the "good client" as the student who is expected to listen and to conform. The trainee is expected to follow the trainer's instructions and not do as she or he wishes. Janet (age 39,

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[5] www.focus-training.com/if-carlsberg-made-personal-training-clients/, accessed on 23.06.2013.

language teacher) describes a similar view on how to be a good trainee and likewise emphasizes the importance of listening:

> *Janet: Well, I think you have got to be prepared to listen to what the fitness instructor has to offer to you because you know they are the people who are skilled in that, they are the professionals and I think you need to be able to listen to what it is they are offering to you. And it takes time. You have to go there for more than one session to get that really. So you have to be courageous I think and you have to be willing to take a few risks…You have to be open to hearing what the suggestions are. You might be asked to try an exercise and you might not think that you can do it but you don't know before you try. That's the whole point of going to a personal trainer I think. … You really have to – because it's a lot of instructions with the exercises. So you have got to listen carefully to understand what it is that you've been asked to do. Then you got to be prepared to try it. There is no point in saying "I don't want to do this". … And that's helping developing a working relationship you have with your fitness instructor.*

According to Janet, one can – and should - not just learn to listen but also accept advice and appreciate the trainer's expertise. As mentioned in the previous section, the binary of 'trainer' and 'trainee' implies a hierarchy where the fitness instructor assumes the role of an expert and authority. Janet succinctly puts it in the extract above by saying that "there is no point in saying I don't want this", for opposing the trainer is counter-productive in the context of PT where the trainer knows best and the client is expected to rely on her. "Listening" can be thought of as a *technology of power*. In Foucault's (1988b) vocabulary, that itself borrows from the Greek word 'techne' as a practical rationality governed by a conscious aim, 'technologies of power' describe the concrete, context-dependent ways and channels through which power is applied. Listening to the trainer means to accept his or her expertise and authority, and to some degree, to submit one's self to his or her will.

Expertise is not just conveyed through the listing of degrees and athletic achievements printed on adverts but also inscribed into the trainer's verbal instructions and embodied interventions. The bodily closeness between trainer and client, and relatedly the physical contact that takes place between the two, is

actually a vital element of PT. As trainers' primary role is to instruct and to 'correct' clients' movements and postures physical contact is necessary. As illustrated in the pictures below, the trainer holds, pulls, pushes, straightens, and presses various body parts.

When I had one-to-one training as part of this research I initially found this type of physical contact uncomfortable. The fact that my personal trainer was a muscular young man in his late 20s certainly had an effect on how I felt during my initial PT sessions. As George (2008) reminds us, in addition to and in intersection with skin colour, class, age, and sexual orientation, gender plays a vital role in the interactive service sector where power relations and inequalities of wider society are reflected and played out in an inter-subjective space. In terms of gender, one can observe that in everyday encounters men have less difficulty exerting influence and power onto others. This is related to the fact that in white Western societies being female is typically associated with nurture and care whilst being male is associated with professionalism, competence and authority - characteristics that are vital when it comes to conveying knowledge and expertise such as in PT (Carli, 1999; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Hence, the uneasiness I felt initially can partly be explained through my own reluctance to accept directives from men - especially when these directives are aimed at my body - precisely because of my critical awareness of the aforementioned hegemonic gender dynamics. Interestingly though, after a few times I started not to mind and even to appreciate my trainer's embodied interventions.

Touch and physical proximity

To understand this shift in my experience it is useful to think about the use of touch in medical profession: In a historical account, Smith et al. (2001) write that the 'healing touch' in medical and quasi-medical encounters can be traced back ancient magico-religious practices where touching is employed as a technique to find a source of, and remedy for, spiritual or physical suffering ('laying-on-of-hands'). One can observe that the 'diagnostic touch' is firmly established in today's medical practice. In addition to listening and observing, physical examination is a widely employed method in medicine where patients are used to, and even expect, tactile interventions when they seek out a physician. One of the

reasons my initial ambivalence during the first PT session partly dissolved certainly had to do with my immediate, albeit not conscious, remembering of this widely employed culturally accepted practice in health-related professions. Rather than feeling intimidated by the masculine, white man who gets paid for telling women (and men) what to do with and to their bodies, I may have started seeing him as a health-care practitioner whose task-oriented touch is somehow 'neutral' and essential to providing the best services to me.

Quite surprisingly, most interviewees ceased to dwell on physical proximity and bodily contact as important aspects of PT even when I explicitly addressed this issue. Participants downplayed this aspect of PT or 'explained it away'. Rather than telling me what physical contact in the context of PT *meant* to them, they spoke of its functional necessity. There are at least two reasons why this might be the case: Firstly, in industrial white societies physical touch between individuals is rather omitted from public space (Paterson, 2007). Signs of affection such as caressing, hugging, cuddling, stroking or kissing are spatially distributed, that is, they are tolerated in some spaces and sanctioned in others. If physical proximity does occur in public it tends to be restricted to (heterosexual) couples and to children with their caregivers. At the gym, which can be considered a semi-public place, the socially established rule of not touching and being touched by strangers is partially suspended. Nonetheless, given the sensitivity of touching in public in general, this topic is perhaps discomforting to talk about.

Another reason participants did not elaborate on physical proximity may be rooted in the fact that physical touch *qua* social practice is typically associated with emotional intimacy and sexuality (Thien, 2005). For the moment of the touch the distance between two people is diminished and a state of closeness and mutuality arises – both figuratively and actually. Touching is never 'neutral'; it always adds something to the relationship between two people, assuming and establishing some sort of relatedness. This may actually be the reason my personal trainer used diverse strategies to avoid an interpretation of his touch aside from that which the professional frame would allow for. To avoid what could have been understood as sexual or romantic he always asked me for permission before touching my abdomen, buttocks or inner thighs, or explained to me what he was doing whilst

stretching. Another strategy that I have observed is that some personal trainers put a towel between themselves and the client's body when they are stretched at the end of a session. Apart from the pragmatic reasons, such as keeping the client's sweaty body warm after the work-out in order to avoid injuries, this very gesture can also be understood as an attempt to establish a material and symbolic boundary between the trainer's body and the body of the client. Putting a towel between the trainer's and trainee's body indicates that the touch can potentially be meaningful; that it can open up a space for intimacy and thus be understood on a relational register. Whether the 'towel-tactic' is a successful strategy, whether it helps to establish a distance between trainer and trainee and whether it actually prevents inappropriate emotions to arise is not relevant here. What I would like to stress it that this seemingly neutral and functional gesture is a counter-strategy to avoid the space for intimacy that physical nearness and tactility open up.

'Interpersonal Skills'

In advice books the ideal personal trainer is depicted as someone who can assume multiple roles, from being a 'lifestyle manager' to a 'significant other' (J. Crossley, 2012, p. 239). Not only is he or she expected to excel as a fitness expert but also as someone able to bond with clients. In order to retain clients, personal trainers are advised to acquire and display what handbooks often call social or 'interpersonal skills'.[6] These entail:

> *service strategies such as sending clients birthday and thank-you cards, leaving motivations messages on clients' answering machines, or faxing clients workout instructions when they are away on business trips. (IDEA Personal Trainer cited in Smith-Maguire, 2008, p. 157)*

Sending cards is regarded as a sign of care and at the same time a way to influence clients' exercise behaviour outside the gym environment. As another website writes:

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[6] It should briefly be noted that whilst the term 'interpersonal skill' is borrowed from the discipline of psychology it is part of a wider discourse. Conceptually, the term presupposes that subjectivity and inter-subjectivity can be operationalized, measured and enhanced through specialized skills trainings (for a critical engagement with the term see Sampson 1981).

Showing up and signing a cheque for personal training sessions isn't enough to ensure a client meets their goals. A good client will continue to work hard outside training sessions, no matter what their goal is. A personal trainer can't possibly watch over a client 24 hours a day. (Focus Training, 2012)

Advice books instruct trainers in more micro-level practices, too. Often, a series of instructions on how to appear, to speak, to approach and to interact with fitness participants is described in minute detail. Roberts (1996), for example, recommends that personal trainers hold eye contact, stand tall with shoulders back, look relaxed, wear their best warm-up suit, use a commanding voice, be attentive, and display a sense of humour. Personal trainers ought to be 'good listeners' who ask clarifying questions, repeat what the client has just said, do not rush, or interrupt, show poise and emotional control and respond with a nod or smile. Below are two exemplary excerpts from handbooks:

When persuading people to become your clients, you must feel completely comfortable in your role and be able to put them at ease the minute you smile and shake their hand. Your presentation must be serious, yet light and informative without being too clever. That turns people off…Your presentation must never be condescending or make people feel inferior because they may be out of shape. (Thorton, 2001, p. 44)

Bringing your skills and training back to a personal level includes an on-going dialogue with your clients and exhibiting people skills that communicate 'I care about you'. This is best shown by your detailed attention to your clients' needs, your personal growth and behaviour, and your delivery of impeccable service. You should have the ability to charm, cajole, educate, and prod when necessary. (Roberts, 1996, p. 103)

Both extracts are concerned with the presentation of the self – a presentation that entails an unthreatening and modest demeanour and a caring attitude. The extracts do not tell trainers to *be* caring, modest etc. – only how to *present* themselves along these lines. Both extracts call for what Hochschild (1983) calls "emotional labour", that is, a certain level of enthusiasm and enjoyment to be displayed in

front of clients.[7] Emotional labour has several functions of which one is to retain clients by keeping them satisfied. Service work professionals adapt to certain 'feeling rules' that are associated with their profession and to do this, they seek to 'manage', control, and supress or evoke certain emotions.

In their discussion of PT, Harvey et al. (2013) extend the notion of emotional labour by drawing attention to Hardt and Negri's (2000, 2004) concept of 'immaterial labour'. 'Immateriality' is taken literally here, referring to products that are not tangible. According to Hardt and Negri, immaterial labour encompasses most service work in the new global economy where the employees' main function is to "create[s] immaterial products, such as knowledge, information, communication, a relationship, or an emotional response" (Hardt & Negri 2004, p. 108). The authors identify two kinds of immaterial labour of which one is "primarily intellectual or linguistic, such as problem solving, symbolic and analytical tasks, and linguistic expressions" and the other affective, involving both body and mind, "labour that produces or manipulates affects such as a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement or passion" (Hardt & Negri 2004, p. 108). Whilst PT certainly involves knowledge-based activities, affects are also pivotal to the labour of personal trainers. They are not just expected to perform and convey a certain emotional state ("you smile and shake their hand") but they are also advised to evoke, contain and regulate the emotions of their clients. Indeed, a great deal of texts in handbooks is concerned with how to encourage a positive state of mind in clients. What I would like to discuss in the following is one particular 'immaterial' product that PT generates, namely emotional reciprocity and co-dependence between trainers and trainees.

Relationality, care and concern

With the exception of one participant in this study, all have agreed that the longer they worked with a personal trainer, the closer their relationship became and the more reluctant they were to exercise with someone else. Hannah (35-years researcher), who has been training with the same personal trainer for 2.5 years

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[7] For a comprehensive literature review over the use and extension of Hochschild's original concept see Wharton (1999) and Steinberg and Figart (1999).

says that it has always been "about her rather than having just a personal trainer". She explains:

> *Hannah: I think the trainer I work is a good psychologist. I think she got me immediately. She just understood how I worked and what I meant when I said this, I would really mean that.... And I just like her. We chat you know. I spend two hours a week with her and I like every minute of it. I said once to somebody, other than my partner who I live with it is the second significant relationship in my life. And it's a joke but actually in terms of contact, yes, I spend more time with her than anybody else apart from my partner ... No, but really it is a sort of significant emotional relationship.*

Interestingly, at a later stage of the interview she reveals that her personal trainer is planning to go abroad for a year. She says she wants to "wait for her to come back" and not to look for another trainer. One may ask why most trainees have such a strong attachment to their trainers. Zara (age 52), a psychotherapist by profession, hypothesizes:

> *Zara: I had personal training a couple of times in my life. They must be trained in some ways, that's why they are called trainers but they are quite seductive in trying to make you feel that you are doing the right thing. The last time I had personal training was around Christmas time and I saw him five, six times. He was a young, handsome man and he was extremely supportive and I thought this is so much nicer than when my sons are with me (laughing). They make you feel good, they are much better than therapists, you know (laughing). There is very little pain involved in a sense, I mean there is obviously physical pain. But there is something seductive about it.*

Zara's comparison between PT and psychotherapy opens up the question as to whether PT bears the traces of what Rose (1998) calls a 'psy- discipline'. The prefix 'psy' designates here that vocabularies and techniques typical of applied psychology enter other, seemingly unrelated, institutional domains such as the army, the school, the factory, the hospital etc. This is especially the case when the aim is to improve

> the capacity of individuals to exercise authority over themselves…to understand their own actions and to regulate their own conduct. The exercise of authority,

here, becomes a therapeutic matter: the most powerful way of acting upon the actions of others is to change the ways in which they will govern themselves. (Rose, 1998, p. 64)[8]

The point Rose makes about psy-disciplines here speaks to Zara's account, although Zara clearly differentiates between psychotherapy and PT. Zara considers personal trainers to be working in opposite ways to psychotherapists because the former are "trying to make you feel that you are doing the right thing". To stress the divergence between the two professions, perhaps in a slightly defensive mode because she is a psychotherapist herself, she maintains with an ironic undertone that the supportive and reassuring demeanour of personal trainers render them even better psychotherapists. Whilst there are certainly profound differences between the two professions, I would suggest that a certain analogy between PT and other psy-disciplines can nonetheless be drawn: PT's overall agenda is to bring about individual change (change in physique and habits). For these changes to happen clients are expected to activate and manage their own resources and to act upon themselves with the help of a credentialed specialist. As we have seen above, the role of this specialist involves more than technical guidance, requiring some sort of reciprocity: to the extent that the trainee feels that she is also performing for the trainer. Here, *confession* plays a great role. In *History of Sexuality*, Foucault writes:

> The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it

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[8] The point Rose (1998) wants to draw attention to is that the proliferation of psy-techniques coincides with the spread of liberal democracy as a form of political government. Hence, he considers the emergence of psy-disciplines as a vital component of governmentality.

exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation. (Foucault, 1984, pp. 61-62)

Similar to the act of listening, confessing can operate as a technology of power, too. Disciplinary power often operates and reproduces itself through expert-knowledge. Here the expert assumes the role of an authority who invites confessionary practices. This authoritative 'expert', in Foucault's account, does not need to be a particular person, but can, as Scott (2011) writes, be a formal or informal code of practice or a system of knowledge. Hence, one may not only consider personal trainers to be authoritative experts, but, more exhaustingly, the fitness gym *qua* system of knowledge producing its own vocabularies, institutional practices, codes of conduct and ways of knowing can be regarded as an authority.

I would like to turn to another point that Zara makes when she states that the undivided attention of someone physically attractive with a kind, responsive and appreciative manner can be seductive. To shed more light on the notion of 'seductive' it is worth considering body-oriented service work more generally. As George writes:

the provision of [such] emotionally attentive body-oriented service can lead to misunderstandings about personal trainers' intentions or the nature of their service…where clients [would] seek personal, and even, sexual, relationships with them. (Georges, 2008, p. 119)

The fact that advice texts draw attention to the danger of clients misinterpreting the relationship to the trainer further underlines this point. As in the extract below, personal trainers are strongly advised to maintain a clear distance between their professional and private selves:

Personal training is just that — personal. Your client may come to think of you as her friend. That's a good thing, but it also invites unprofessional behaviour. If a client starts, say, complaining that her husband doesn't pay attention to her, you need to draw that boundary line. Say, "I hear you, I understand" — but don't offer advice or tell her what a jerk her husband is (...) You have your personal

self, and your professional self. (...) It's natural over the course of a training plan for a trainer and client to become comfortable with each another. This level of comfort often extends to sharing personal details, trust, and may perhaps lead to friendship. Despite this, however, there are boundaries that must be enforced in this relationship. (Focus Training, 2014)

What is anticipated here is a potential dilemma that trainers may face: On the one hand, the relationship they develop with their clients should be friendly to guarantee a good working relationship; on the other hand, trainers are warned not to disclose too much about their 'personal selves' by commenting on private matters such as their clients' other relationships. That this two-fold role is rather difficult to maintain in practice is discernible in many other advice texts. In my analysis I could identify not only variations but also contradictions about the 'professional' and 'private' divide *across* handbooks. The following extract suggests quite a different way of being for trainers than the one cited above:

The best way to support your clients is to get to know them as people, and the way to do this is to familiarize yourself with how they live their lives. Find out the names of their spouses and children, the kind of cars they drive, where they work, any special problem they may be going through, or anything that is an issue in their lives. This shows that you acknowledge them on levels other than just the physical...by caring enough to remember important things about your clients, you actually become part of their lives. Once you become a positive part of someone's life, he or she will have a tendency to tell his or her family, friends and co-workers about you and the rest is history (Thornton, 2001, p. 37)

Here, trainers are not discouraged from being too personal, too close but, quite the opposite, to be as personal as possible, even to "become part of their lives". In order to accomplish this, they are advised to inquire about the private lives of their clients, to build a friendly relationship *beyond* the fitness work-out in order to show that they "acknowledge them on levels other than just the physical". Whilst most interviewees agreed that conversations with personal trainers have often gone beyond fitness related issues, none of them stated that they would meet their trainers outside the gym setting. Only Amy (age 29), one of the few personal

trainers I have interviewed, described her relationship to clients as "deeply personal":

Ceren: How would you describe the relationship to your clients?

Amy: It's a very intimate relationship. I do socialize with my clients as well. We go out in the evenings. There is one client and I went to dinner with him and his wife many many times. There is one older man who is this very protective, fatherly figure for me. We always talk about very intimate things. He once invited me over on a Saturday to his family, to Cambridge to meet his daughter. With one client we talked about an exhibition. He is an art lover. We exchange and debate about different works of art. We recommend exhibitions to each other. It's deeply personal. Maybe I am an atypical trainer. My second client today brought me a book that I should read, he said. It's a book about love and relationships. Actually you made me remember how much I like my work, how much I like working with clients. They are all friends, with only a few exceptions and that's not just me that's what everybody does. It is a very private, intimate setting.

The first thing to note is that Amy's professional practice resonates with the handbook's advice to become a positive part of clients' lives. But unlike what the handbook implies, Amy does not give the impression that her actions are strategic for she neither mentions nor implies profitability as a motive. The contrary seems to be true: she says that the interview with me made her remember how much she likes her work, respectively, her clients that are more to her than just clients. They invite her to their homes, she has dinner with their families, she receives books from them and they talk about intimate topics. Although one may speculate whether Amy's case is rather the exception than the rule, her account hints at a crucial aspect of body-oriented service in general and PT in particular, namely that the relationship between trainers and trainees is rarely one-directional but based on mutuality. This mutuality, as I will discuss in the following section, may give rise to attachments that exceed what one would expect of a friendly customer- service provider relationship, though.

'Transference love'

Amy's description of "the older man who is this very protective, fatherly figure for me" is interesting in this context. Here, she self-identifies as more than her

customer's personal trainer, as someone who is closer to being a daughter. Respectively, the customer inhabits a role that is closer to being a father. Similar to Hannah's case, there is clearly something more going on between the two than the provision and reception of a service. When I ask Cassy (32 years), a full-time personal trainer for nine years, whether there was ever a situation she found difficult to deal with, she tells me about a client who had fallen in love with her:

> *Cassy: There was one case. One man who had the impression, he was convinced that I was the one without knowing me. I put it aside and we kept training together. And it became very very very tense. And we started fighting in the session over really petty things and it became unbearable and we decided he should just leave. It was a problem. Apparently I was the one but I don't think he knew my last name. He knew me in that particular setting. I think there is a name for it, a syndrome, right? You fall in love with your teacher, trainer, doctor. Transference love, isn't it?*

Cassy does not believe in the authenticity of her client's crush on her. She draws on the psychoanalytic notion of transference to grasp what her client might have experienced during training. Simply put, 'transference love' describes a situation in which the patient believes he or she has fallen in love with his or her analyst. Freud (1993, [1915]) called this form of love unreal and 'impersonal', claiming that it was the analytic situation that stimulated the patient to fall in love and not the analyst as such. Transference love in the clinical context is thought of as something that must be understood and worked through with the patient. One may assume that transference love or an equivalent phenomenon can actually develop in the gym setting, too. By identifying what has happened to her as 'transference love' Cassy suggests that her client's crush on her was almost inescapable. She seems to believe that the training setting as such is prone to creating some sort of emotional attachment on the side of the client. She may even have an awareness of how the emotional and bodily labour she accomplishes contributes to an atmosphere in which what she describes as 'transference love' becomes likely to arise. Interviews with trainees suggest that this may indeed be the case. Analogies of a love relationship, or other vocabularies associated with a romantic relationship, have been used by five female interviewees. Kate, (40 years old, administrator in a human recourses department) has been training at the gym for

five years and decided to try out personal training last year as she felt she was "at a plateau". After three months she decided to stop the training due to financial reasons and felt "horrible" about that:

> *Kate: It felt like splitting up with someone really. I know this sounds funny but you spent a lot of time with this person. Almost every morning for three months. But I realised during the Christmas break that I couldn't afford her anymore. My mum had some financial difficulties and I had to help her out. It was a bit awkward because she [the personal trainer] kind of assumed that I would continue and we were two sessions into the second block when she said, you realise we are already in a new block. I said, well actually I was planning to have some time off and take it up later this year. It's purely financial, I told her, it has nothing to do with you. I felt horrible though. There was this moment of awkwardness. But I still see her around and she says Hi so it's all fine (laughing).*

The language Kate uses to describe the cancellation of her contract ("It felt like splitting up with somebody") invokes the end of a love relationship. Kate's emotional response ("It was a bit awkward", "I felt horrible"), shows that even a three months' relationship between trainers and trainees may lead to an expectation of continuance in which ending this relationship evokes both guilt and pity. The fact that handbooks warn trainers not to get too involved in clients' personal lives may then be read as a caveat, implying that strong affective commitment is a potential and 'dangerous' by-product of PT.

Emotional reciprocity

One of the more unexpected findings was that some participants were, at times, worried about their trainers. Based on my interviews, I could identify two main areas that caused concern on the part of the fitness participant: the first has to do with the precarious job situation freelance trainers may face on the market and the second with the physical and emotional well-being of their trainer. As widely acknowledged, gender inequalities are extensively played out in the service sector: here, on average, females earn less real hourly wage than males for the same type of labour whilst also having to work more hours in the same positions (e.g. McDowell, 2008; Kerfoot & Korczynski 2005). Although there are no official statistics, one can assume that the working conditions of men and women in the

fitness sector are subject to the same principles. It is, then, perhaps not surprising that female interviewees especially demonstrate a heightened awareness on this topic:

Kate: (...) My trainer is a freelancer and it must be hard to work as a personal trainer, especially as a woman. I feel empathy for her in a way.

Hannah: (...) We always run over time. Always. And she said to me she never books in someone else immediately after me because we always run over time.

Ceren: That means that you are special.

Hannah: But I feel really really bad. It's her livelihood. And I do think it is very very easy to - just suck somebody's time because it's not an equal relationship. I'm paying her to make me feel better. I know that and she is completely brilliant at her job. And she has the right for that to stop after an hour and she can't be in a bad mood, well, sometimes she is, but the contract in a way is, what makes her good in her job is her cheerfulness, it is her kind of sunny personality. And I feel like there must be days when that's an effort and, yeah, she has the right for that to stop, to sit down and have a cup of tea.

There are parallels between Kate's and Hannah's accounts in that both show a sensibility towards their trainers' employment conditions. The very fact that most personal trainers work on a part-time and non-contractual basis can give their lives a degree of anxious precarity. This might explain Hannah's bad conscience and Kate's empathic concern. Whilst Kate's short comment suggests that she is aware of the intersections of class and gender, Hannah's account points to the power inequalities inherent to the trainee-trainer relationship. Far from being content with her trainer spending more time with her than she has technically paid for, Hannah has a bad conscience ("But I feel really really bad"). She acknowledges that this relationship is grounded in economic principles where the customer must be kept 'entertained' through the affective display of the service-provider. However, as often the case in long-term relationships in the service industry, there is more to it than an economic exchange. As in the previous section, Hannah and her trainer seem to be genuinely fond of each other. That the

trainer disregards her own economic interests by running over time is a proof of her fondness towards her client which, in turn, leads to an emotional dilemma for Hannah: precisely because there is a connectedness between Hannah and her trainer, Hannah is reluctant to violate her trainer's boundaries of professionalism and friendship; she does not wish to exploit her trainer, to "suck up her time", as she puts it. It can be argued that Hannah's guilt is symptomatic of the somehow uneasy binary between PT as a consumer service and PT as a relationship between two people that, almost inevitably, gives rise to mutual affection.

As stated above, whilst personal trainers are expected to be sensitive to their clients' needs and concerns, my interviews indicate that clients can also be responsive to the physical and emotional well-being of their trainers. When I ask Diane whether she knows anything personal about her trainer she responds as follows:

> *Diane: Yes, I do. She is in her mid-30s, she is having a baby. When we first started talking, speaking about all sorts of things, she had her boyfriend and we were talking about communication. And a few things I said to her that she put into practice and they worked. She was really pleased about that. Because I had said, "Don't forget, men like to solve a problem, and sometimes women want some tea and sympathy and a listening ear". Quite a few things we talk about. I've been married for 28 years and she asked me how do I accomplish this…But now she is having a baby next year so we talk a lot about babies now (laughing). She is so worried about being a mum and I tell her not to, and she really has no reason why she should be. (…) She has a lot of questions about life and everything, and we discuss things. She is like "Can I ask you this?"*

Diane's interaction with her trainer stands somehow in contrast to the official canon. If we remember, handbooks and other advice texts propagate the idea that personal trainers and trainees should not get 'too close', or 'too involved'. What we find here is almost the opposite, however. Diane is not only involved in her trainer's private life, but her account also suggests that some sort of reversal of roles takes place in the trainer-trainee relationship. When conversing about relationships and motherhood, the 64-year-old Diane is the one with expertise and her trainer is clearly keen on what Diane has to say. Important to note, Diane does

not just give 'technical' information on how to raise a baby, or how to communicate with her partner, but – and this arguably is where the truly 'personal' comes to the fore – she listens, takes her trainer's worries seriously and responds in a reassuring, almost maternal manner ("She is so worried about being a mum and I tell her not to, and she really has no reason why she should be."). Whilst Diane and her trainer speak openly about issues that are of personal relevance to her trainer, Roxanne (36 years, art curator) and her trainer remain silent about things that are potentially uncomfortable and could thus endanger the relationship if acknowledged:

> *Roxanne: My personal trainer's body has changed a lot since we've been training. She has got a body that everyone would aspire to ... When we started training together she was very thin and very strong but not particularly skinny. And recently she has been training very very hard, to the point where I start worrying about her at some point. Although I am sure she knows much more about what she is doing than I do...Also, my trainer is incredibly, incredibly self-conscious about her body. She wears baggy clothes and I know she has a very conflicting relation with her body.*

> *Ceren: You said, you worry about her losing so much weight. Have you ever mentioned this to her?*

> *Roxanne: Well, I asked her, she probably knows what I was about, I asked her questions like how much she is training and what she is training for because I want to know. And I talk to her about food because she always asks me what I had for breakfast, she always makes sure that I eat something for breakfast, she makes me eat breakfast (laughing). So I asked her what she was having for breakfast. I would try to keep an eye on her, what she has been eating...But I haven't straight said to her, I think you are losing weight and I absolutely wouldn't. Partly because I know what is going on in her life to know what it could be to do with (...) And she smokes, she never told me but I know she does. And for her sake, I really mind. I've bitten my tongue about it loads of time, and also what would I say to her but I really wished she didn't 'cause fitness is what she does for living and it's like, you need your lungs. But I bite my tongue about it.*

Roxanne is concerned about her trainer's health and, relatedly, about her career as a fitness trainer ("'cause fitness is what she does for living and it's like, you need your lungs"). However, she finds it difficult to address these issues because she is aware of her trainers' complicated relationship with her own body. Also, she undermines her own judgement because: "I am sure she knows much more about what she is doing than I do". Nonetheless, Roxanne cannot remain entirely silent, making little 'interventions' such as asking her trainer what she had for breakfast. This is where the reversal of roles becomes evident: By imitating her trainer ("she always asks me what I had for breakfast"), Roxanne "keep[s] an eye on her", hoping to make her eat regular meals. Similar to Diane, Roxanne cares about her trainer; her trainer's emotional and physical well-being are of relevance to her.

"They almost make you go nowhere and fall into the trap"

Whilst one of the things that emerged from the data was that fitness participants often show a sensibility towards the financial difficulties personal trainers may face as freelance workers, there were also participants in the sample who felt at unease with the commercial side of personalized fitness training. In the course of this research, I observed many gym members working out with a personal trainer. Even in low budget gyms such as PureGym, it was standard to see at least a few clients on the gym floor working out with instructors. Simultaneously, my sense was that the number and activities of 'ordinary' fitness instructors decreased. It started becoming more difficult for me to find a trainer when I needed one: they were simply less visible on the gym floor, or engaged with PT clients. As Jennifer (age 42, researcher) informs me, LA Fitness has recently stopped offering training advice so that members are now obliged to pay a personal trainer for this service:

> *Jennifer: (…) In the past you could sort of, when you signed up, talk with them about your goals and make a programme and they used to review it every 12 weeks. Apparently this has all changed and they say, we don't offer that, we offer personal training. But that's not what you signed up to and I kind of, a couple of months ago, I said: Look, this is not the deal…I paid once and you want me to pay again. So I pay twice then. Because I am paying to get into the gym and then I am paying the trainer. So basically I have signed up for a room full of equipment and that's it. And what you end up doing is you go to the web or get*

free leaflets to design your own exercises. They almost make you go nowhere and fall into the trap of personal training really.

Jennifer is noticeably upset about her gym's new policy. She feels misled because the contract she signed had different conditions to the one she is confronted with now. To pay extra for a service that used to be free makes her angry up to a point where she begins to question the legitimacy of her gym membership ("So basically I have signed up for a room full of equipment and that's it."). What she faces is a dilemma: she is convinced that without the input of fitness instructors it will be difficult to make progress but at the same time, she feels at unease and does not want to "fall into the trap of personal training", which is leaving members with no other choice than hiring a personal trainer. To establish PT as a central part of fitness training, gyms spend much energy to promote their services, not only on large displays but also by approaching potential clients on the gym floor. Three of my interviewees, however, expressed their irritation about the offensive approach personal trainers can take:

Liz: When you are at the gym the personal trainers are walking around all the time looking for business. So even when you are on the rowing machine or something and then you are thinking: Am I doing this wrong or what is it? They come by and say: How long have you been coming? And you don't know at first because they have got a shirt that says LA Fitness and then they turn around and it says Personal Trainer. And then they say, have you thought about personal training and you are like 'Oh, again?' And I really mind that level of - 'cause it's one thing to say we've got it and it's here for you and you can see some clients working with trainers.

There is a sense of anger in Liz' words about when trainers approach her, her realisation that it is not because they want to correct or comment on her exercise routine but because they are trying to sell their services. She finds the trainers' manner intrusive, especially as it seems to happen repeatedly. One can speculate whether Liz may not just be annoyed but also disappointed by the personal trainers' dishonesty: what appears to be a genuine interest in her as a fitness member turns out to be a marketing strategy to win her as a PT client. Susan (69 years, emeritus philosophy professor) completely rejects the idea of having regular PT ("I do not need anybody to motivate me") and states that she cancelled

her previous gym membership because of the overly assertive attitude of some personal trainers:

> *Susan: They used to try to sell me personal training sessions at my old gym. That was the Hilton gym up the road. I had been there for years. They were much more pushy about personal training up to a point where I got really cross about them. The emphasis was quite on the personal training and on profit and making money. So I left.*

The sense of disappointment is apparent in Susan's account when she remarks that she had been training there for years, implying that she had been a loyal client. As her loyalty and her wish not to work with a personal trainer were not appreciated she cancelled her membership and signed up at another gym close-by. One of the things that can be extracted from the accounts above is that not every gym user wishes to receive the personalized service that PT has to offer. Some members simply do not want another person to pay such close attention to their bodies. On the contrary, they want to remain somehow anonymous and an ordinary gym user, which proves itself to be difficult since gyms seek to implement PT more and more as an integral part of the fitness landscape.

6.6 Conclusion

I have argued in the theoretical chapters of this thesis that a Foucauldian type of discourse analysis often 'forgets' that discourse inscribes and unfolds itself on the inter-/transactional and the affective level. To address this gap in the literature and to offer a more psychosocial understanding of the workings of discourse, I have shifted my analytical focus to the relational dynamics between gym participants and their trainers in this chapter. More precisely, I have looked at two specific encounters in which a face-to-face (or body-to-body) interaction takes place. To invoke Roseneil and Ketokivi (2015) again, subjectivities emerge in the '*trans*actional' sphere, that is, between two or more individuals whereas each encounter may transform the subjects involved in this process in multiple ways. We have seen that during the induction staff members present themselves as 'service providers' and gym members are positioned as 'service-recipients/customers', respectively. However, the induction seems also to work through a medical frame in which participants are put into the position of patients

whilst members of staff are presented as quasi-medical experts who make use of a set of tools, techniques and vocabularies evocative of a doctor-patient encounter. Interestingly, these two different modes of interacting, the economic and the medical, are not mutually exclusive but complementary: that is, there is a constant oscillation between the two meaning frames and even at times a degree of overlap. What became also evident is that both during the induction, and even more so during PT, primacy is granted to what can be called a 'personalisation' of fitness training. By personalisation I refer to two issues: first, various discursive techniques produce the gym user as an individual by presupposing and substantiating the idea of their 'uniqueness'. The fact that the service given by personal trainers is promoted as suited to the participant's abilities, personality, goals, problems etc. can be called an *individualizing* strategy with an imperative to work upon the self (e.g. Bauman, 2013; Beck & Beck-Gersheim, 2002). In the context of the trainer-trainee relationship the aim is to produce knowledge about the new gym member, gathering and archiving his or her idiosyncrasies. This produced 'knowledge' provides a grid of intelligibility for gym users, that is, a mode of seeing, reading and understanding their bodies. Secondly, by 'personalisation' I refer to the relationship between trainers and trainees. Whilst the personality of the trainer may not necessarily be foregrounded during the induction, it is certainly one of the main tenets of PT. Adverts portray trainers as *individuals* with a particular life history and character, certain preferences and fields of expertise. Hence, trainees do not just hire anonymous service providers but 'real' work-out partners. Paterson (2007) comments on the proliferation of one-to-one service from another perspective when he writes that

> …there is the faint but unmistakable underlying need for connection, a yearning for contact and proximity in a potentially isolating and alienating world, perhaps exacerbated by the emphasis on hollow consumerism in late capitalism.
> (Paterson, 2007, p.149)

One may speculate, whether the fitness industry takes up this very need for connection and turns it into a profitable service. There are at least two interrelated forms of intimacy between trainers and trainees: physical and emotional intimacy, whereas physical closeness was to a great extent not talked about, rationalised or downplayed by interviewees. Emotional intimacy, on the other hand, was talked

about more extensively. Most gym users said that they liked their fitness trainers as persons and vice versa, with some describing them even as a "fatherly figure" or "closest person after my partner". However, as my analysis has shown, relationships between trainers and trainees are not unrestrained but oscillate between intimacy and distance. PT handbooks also contain both messages on how to establish a friendly and intimate relationship with clients and, at the same time, they warn about getting too close or too involved, drawing clear boundaries between the personal and the professional sphere. One strategy to establish distance is to activate the economic frame I discussed at the beginning of this chapter. It seems that if trainers present themselves as 'service providers' and gym members as 'service-recipients/customers' a 'sober' relationship can be re-established. Having studied the trainer-trainee relationship the next chapter looks at the interactions and performances on the gym floor.

7

The other (some-) bodies at the fitness site

In this chapter I foreground the role of 'others' at the gym and analyse the fitness site's interactional and performative dynamics. By looking at three distinct areas – the gym floor, the group exercise and the changing room – I discuss to what extent the gym can be considered a social space. Regarding the gym floor, I argue that a lot of bodily enactments and performances are employed by participants to avoid potential embarrassments and to maintain a certain 'gym-identity' that is also strongly gendered. By looking at the spatial segmentation of PureGym as an illustrative example I show how gendered patterns of exercise are being promoted by spatial means. Furthermore, I shed light on the interactional dynamics of group exercise and suggest that encouraged synchronization of behaviour brings about a corporeal affinity with the trainer and fellow participants. However, gym classes also have a competitive dimension and may produce subtle forms of rivalry, and shame. At the end of this chapter, I discuss two features of the changing room: first I suggest that it is a space that allows for exhibitionist and voyeuristic tendencies to emerge and second, it is habit forming in a way that it prescribes certain ways of doing gender.

7.1 Familiar anonymity

Some authors depict the gym as a social space by arguing that regular members tend to form social bonds that exceed the boundaries of the fitness locale (Craig & Liberti, 2007; Crossley, 2004, Tulle & Dorrer, 2012). Based on his empirical research, Crossley (2004) argues that gym members are often part of "durable social networks" (Crossley, 2004, p.61), organising cycling trips or dinner parties on the weekends, exchanging CDs, helping each other out with job-hunting. Craig and Liberti's (2007) fieldwork in a women-only gym suggests that the intimate, 'nurturing' and non-competitive environment encourages women to interact with both members and staff in a friendly manner. Due to the spatial setting (the equipment is arranged in a circle), as the authors argue, it is virtually impossible *not* to engage in social interaction with others. For the fitness clubs in London I visited for this project this does not seem the case though. Glancing over the gym

floor I could mainly observe participants immersed in practices that did not signal a desire for sociability: many wore earphones, watched TV, read or were occupied with the functions of the machines they were using. Some of my participants even reported that they actively avoid speaking to other members as this distracts them from their own schedule. When I asked my interviewees whether they would consider their gym a social place, I received very similar answers to the one below:

> *Jesse: I do see people like talking and stuff like that. More in the changing rooms, I think, than around the gym floor but there is no space available for socializing. There are some computers up in the lobby, but again that's very solitary but I don't really see a ton of people walking around and talking to each other. I only I think I've met one other person at the gym. I've been going there since this November [4 months, note of the author]. People don't really talk to each other. It's almost like this specific gym is more like individual, competitive and therefore people don't really talk to each other.*

Jesse, a 24-year-old gym regular (post-graduate student), who mostly engages in strength training, provides here two possible reasons for the lack of sociability at his gym: first, a physical lack of social space and second, a competitive atmosphere that does not allow for companionship to emerge. The physical lack of social space at Jesse's gym is rather uncommon. Most gyms have a cafeteria or at least some seating facilities that point towards the possibility of encounter. However, as the next quote shows, a cafeteria does not necessarily guarantee sociability:

> *Ceren: Would you say your gym is a place where people socialize?*
>
> *Meredith: No! No, I wouldn't say so, I would say everyone is basically in their own box and trying not to look at anyone else and there is one, there is a little area with sitting, like a sitting area where you can get your free soda or water. But no one actually talks to anyone else. The only people I'm seeing talking are personal trainers and their trainees or people at the front desk talking to other customers. But there are not social events or whatsoever. But if there were, I wouldn't go there anyway. There are classes though at my gym and I have been to one but no one talked to each other, not even in class.*

Meredith (age 32, client executive) says that "everyone is in their own box" whilst training and her account resonates with my participant observations. She further remarks that if there were social events at her gyms she would not take part in them anyways. More exclusive fitness clubs provide the required physical and material facilities and organise parties as well as other social events on a regular basis. The Park, for example, invites its members at least twice a term to take part in an organised event such on Halloween or Valentine's Day but only a fraction of its members actually participate in those. It seems that most participants enjoy exactly the fact that the social order at the gym differs from most other everyday spaces at which they regularly spend time. Samantha (age 29), who works in a large office states that she actually likes not having to engage with others at the gym:

> *Samantha: I try I think of it as a time of kind of crowded in into myself and not have to talk to anyone else and not have to be nice to anyone. For me it's not a social thing it's just need to do my thing and go.*

In contrast to the workplace where it is commonly expected to be communicative, to exchange pleasantries, to be attentive and responsive the gym offers the opposite: introverted and concentrated on one's own movements one does not feel obliged to engage with others either through words or facial expressions. It should be noted that except one participant none of my interviewees considered the solitary environment of the gym as something negative. Only Alexander (age 28, sales manager) lamented tentatively:

> *Alexander: I go to the gym I do my work out I might say hello to one or two people, have a quick conversation and I come home. In a way that's a bit sad really. If I was doing an organized sort of activity I'd benefit from all sorts of social enjoyments. There is a cost, isn't there? With that convenient model of exercise we lose something else, the social aspect of it. I mean, for me, I feel I have enough friends from other sources. And I don't feel that I have kind of to use my membership of the gym to make more friends. And I don't want more friends really. So that's not an issue for me but at the same time I guess it's regrettable perhaps and for somebody who doesn't have as many friends as they want to have it could be a real issue couldn't it.*

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Alexander believes that the cost one pays for a convenient exercise is the lack of sociability. In Samantha's, Meredith's and Alexander's statements is a sense that if the gym was a place of social encounter the training would lose its efficiency, and thus, a major part of its *raison d'etre*. One could speculate that, like many other public and semi-public sites, the gym is a place in the city where, to borrow Bauman's (2000) phrases, "strangers meet strangers", and where "*mis*-meetings" take place. Like at franchise cafés or restaurants, shopping malls or libraries, the gym setting does not allow for the same kind of sociability one experiences with friends, colleagues, family members or others one has a past and future with. With fellow gym members, there is usually "no picking up at the point where the last encounter stopped, no filling in on the interim trials and tribulations or joys and delights, no shared recollections: nothing to fall back on and to go by in the course of the present encounter" (Bauman, 2000, p. 95) which makes it harder to 'connect'.

Eddie, a 36-year-old lawyer and former fitness trainer himself, is one of the few exceptional participants who does not seek to minimize social interaction at the gym, at least not with the staff. He states that although he does not know any of the fellow members he is friends with three of the fitness instructors:

> *Eddie: There are a handful of clients I don't know their names, I don't think I know any of their names, but I see them every week so I always say "Hello" but usually we don't get pulled into a conversation (…)The only names I know are the ones of the trainers. Funnily enough, if I talk to people who are not employees of the gym usually it's gym related because our only real interaction would be related to something that's happening immediately in the gym like "Are you using this weight?" And then the conversation would just fizzle up. But then if I'm talking to one of the trainers it will usually be about something not gym related because that's kind of the boring stuff. It's understood why we are there, we know each other for years. With them I talk about food or relationships or movies. I mean actually it's almost small talk all the time. So it's never deep. (…)We wouldn't necessary hang out together but there is a level of mutual interest (…).*

> *Ceren: Why wouldn't you hang out with them? Why wouldn't you meet outside the gym?*

Eddie: I would actually be happy to but it doesn't seem like there is been a whole lot - - I mean the other thing is I guess I'd be very happy to on a very superficial level because I really know them very well. So if we could go out and have a drink or hang out I'd be up for it. It's just not really a, it's not something that seems to be on the radar of any of us and it's fine that way because we see each other all the time so I don't think that any of us has really considered – not because there is any type of division or something it's more we see each other every week so.

Although it is common for gym users not to know the names of their fellow participants but the names of the trainers[1], Eddie's relationship to staff can be said to be rather unusual as most gym users' interaction with staff does not go beyond the usual 'gym talk' about training, nutrition etc. One can assume that due to Eddie's own background as a personal fitness trainer he is inclined to identify with the instructors. He does not find that there is a "division" between staff and clients which makes it probably easier for him to engage with fitness instructors on a personal level. Why, one may ask, does it not occur to Eddie and the fitness instructors to spend time together *outside* the gym? Put more generally, why are most people reluctant to engage in social interactions with fellow members, both inside and outside the gym? One way of addressing these questions is to make a detour to Goffman's (1974) idea of the *frame* of a situation.

According to Goffman, the frame of a social setting determines the meaning of a situation, it directs human action, organises experience and "our subjective involvement in them" (Goffman, 1974, p.11). The frame "contains its own logic, its own set of motives, its own meanings and its own activities all of which are quite independent of persons" (Denzin & Keller 1981, p. 55). In other words, it provides a "scaffold", or a *definition of the situation*, that enables certain ways of interacting and behaviour whilst restricting others. The data discussed above suggest that the definition of the gym emphasizes individual action rather than inter-action. Looking at the spatiality of the gym, one can see that all activities that can be accomplished here are designed in a way that participants can do them only on their own. Whether on the treadmill, the strength machine or in class

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[1] This probably has to do with the fact that most trainers wear name tags.

exercise, the gym member acts, in fact *has* to act, relatively independently to carry out an exercise. Further, the spatial distribution of the equipment in rows and the omnipresence of television screens render it, also practically, difficult to make contact with others. However, the gym nonetheless displays a sense of being a social place; the gyms create an aura of sociability, it provides a framework of sociability although social interaction is not the primary function here. This framework functions similar to a background noise or to the décor of a theatre stage; it is perhaps not the focus but still essential for the experience. Even for participants like Eddie, who actually have frequent interactions with others at the gym, it seems difficult to transfer 'friendships' that arise at the gym to the realm outside the place. The acquaintances, so it seems, are *bound* to that place. The frame, then, defines the gym as an individualized and purposive place that foregrounds exercise and, as a consequence, overrides the potential for meaningful personal relations. As the data above shows, others at the gym are often perceived as 'familiar strangers' with whom mutual involvements are restricted to instrumental outcomes. Most participants know the faces of their fellow members but they do not know, nor are interested in knowing, anything related to them *qua* persons.

So far, I have focused only on a form of sociability that is predominantly based on verbal interaction. My interviewees made clear that direct oral communication between participants is either limited or not existent at all in the gym. However, the fact that linguistic utterances are rare does not mean that interaction does not take place at all. In the following I will show that the co-presence of other *bodies* is key to the gym experience. I suggest that the ways in which participants perform and relate to their own bodies is highly affected by the present others. Two dimensions of bodily enactment play a crucial role here: first the gym outfit and second the orchestration of conduct in the gym floor.

7.2 Knowing what to wear

When I joined LA Fitness in February 2011, I 'felt' that my gym attire was unsuitable. After only two visits I decided that I needed a more varied exercise outfit: an outfit that was tighter, more colourful and trendier. I wrote the following into my field diary:

> *I will definitely get a new shirt and functional track pants. The pants I wear now are too short, which makes me look stupid and also not really comfortable. They sell some nice shirts in red and dark purple at the reception but they're a bit expensive for me. I might as well buy those things at Sports Direct. I know I will feel better and more motivated once I've got a new outfit. (field notes, LA Fitness, 28.February 2011)*

I was confident that my new wardrobe would enhance my motivation to work-out and make me feel better about myself. And indeed after having obtained two new shirts and capri pants I felt much more comfortable and somehow more ready to get started. Underlying the attempt to modify my appearance was a desire to be as the other women I have compared myself to at the gym. I wanted to fit into the general schema of appearance expected at the gym. Interestingly, there are numerous discussion forums written by women that are dedicated to choosing the 'right' exercise outfit. The following thread on the online forum MothersSpace[2] exemplifies how many other female participants are concerned about their gym wardrobe. In the following excerpt, the user GreatMum asks for help regarding what to wear at the gym and receives in turn fifty-four responses and comments over a period of one month.

> *GreatMum*
>
> *Hello ladies,*
> *I want to get a new exercise outfit to wear to gym classes. The other mums look so perfect. I am considering leggings, vest, a top, trainers and a jacket…but really don't know. Can you help, please?! Any suggestions of where I can get some?* 🙂

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[2] MothersSpace is a pseudonym for a password protected online forum. As its name suggests, it is mostly aimed at women who have (young) children. The topics covered on the website include childcare, family holidays, baby names, pregnancy, education, toys, weight loss etc. The forum contains 86 threads with gym related issues.

GreatMum has become conscious of the inadequacy of her outfit by comparing herself to other female users at the gym. As she aspires to look like them but has not yet acquired a practical sense, or "feel for the game," (Bourdieu, 1990) she is consulting other, more experienced, participants in this online forum. Most of the answers following GreatMums's request for help are very specific suggestions: Capris, for example, are to be purchased from brands Nike or New Balance but not from Puma; Cassall is recommended for vests; trainers should only be made by Asics. However, discussants do not only give advice on what is best to wear at the gym. Almost half the blog's contents are concerned with what to *avoid* at the gym. One of the items repeatedly identified in online platforms as something to be avoided is the "huge, old shirt".

Anne

Definitely get a sweat- wicking top. You should not wear a lousy old T-shirt that you sweat into and look wet in.
....
Smarty

I agree, do not wear an old shirt – it is not comfortable or flattering.
....
taoli83
…
I will never understand why people wear huge old shirts at the gym. There are always women wearing those shirts in my gym and then they end up upside down the shirt is just hanging around their face so everyone can see their bellies and boobs. You would expect after one time they would realise it's not working but they don't.

All three users attribute negative qualities to the unfitted, cotton T-Shirt. It is described as "lousy", "huge", "old" or "unflattering". That someone would wear a new or neat cotton T-Shirt seems unthinkable. Many respondents seem to agree that the gym outfit should render sweat invisible and hence recommend that GreatMum should wear dark colours and sweat-absorbent materials. The second respondent above maintains that wide T-Shirts are not "flattering," by which she probably means to suggest that they make the body look plump and possibly less feminine. The third respondent mentions the unwitting exposure of breasts or the stomach to which T-Shirts lend themselves. All three attempts to discourage GreatMum from wearing a big T-Shirt vary in their rationale but they share one

underlying message: the right choice of clothing at the gym is essential to counteract potential embarrassments pertaining to the body. The primary function of the fitted, spandex, sleeveless shirt is either to prevent the feeling of inadequacy stemming from sweat stains, the involuntary exposure of female body parts, or a chubby (read: unattractive) appearance. Indeed, many of the responses that are given to GreatMum's initial request on what to wear relate to the avoidance of embarrassment that the body or its functions may cause. The blog contains two other worries about how the body may look in the eyes of the other: The first deals with paleness of the skin and the second with urinary incontinence.

Pale skins and leaky bodies

Towards the middle of the blog GreatMum writes that she is considering wearing three quarter-length leggings but is unsure whether they will look okay with her "pure white legs". Answers provided by the online community are either encouraging or emphatic: One participant, for example, writes "The leggings will be fabulous with your pure white legs, don't worry!" and similarly another user states "I am ok with showing my calves in 3/4 leggings although they are very white". However, other comments demonstrate that GreatMum's anxiety also finds resonance in other women's experiences.

> *Gorgeous*
>
> *Are you me, GreatMum?! I am worried about the 3/4 legging, too, as my legs look like white milk bottles.*
> ....
> *Lisa23*
>
> *I have always been pale. But pale was pretty in my 20s, 30s and even 40s (although I did, at that time, start to use tan spray regularly before gym classes). I am now 50 and I have to say that although I still have great skin, pale skin is perceived as washed out and rather drab. I feel I need colour... I guess you are young. If you are, enjoy your paleness now, as long as you can. As you grow older you may find that a little colour doesn't do any harm.*

Both users can relate to GreatMums's feeling of inadequacy and heightened self-awareness regarding her pale skin. Lisa23 brings in the dimension of age; she notes that she feels almost obliged to employ artificial tanning ("I need colour")

and gives the advice to start tanning after a certain age.[3] Indeed the very fact that almost all gyms I have visited during the last four years – not solely for my fieldwork but as a 'private' person – have had coin-operated sunbeds suggests that a desirable skin tone is part of the fitness regime in these settings alongside the body's shape and volume. As 'sun-kissed' skin is indicative of youthfulness, attractiveness, health and fitness, artificial tanning is a popularly employed body technique for both male and female gym users.[4]

One way of understanding these women's problematizations of their skin colour is to think of self-enhancement as one of the core principles at the gym. It is then perhaps not only the paleness of the skin as such that causes distress amongst some gym users but the idea that others might interpret paleness as an indication of a failure to properly engage with, and take care of, their bodies. As one can see, the preoccupation with the perfect gym outfit is soon side-lined in the online forum and GreatMum's original post opens up a space in which concerns and anxieties about the exposed body at the gym are articulated. Towards the middle of the discussion a somehow unexpected comment on female incontinence makes an occurrence:

> *Supermummy*
>
> *You should avoid jumping jacks or the treadmill if your continence is suspect. Try out the elliptical machine or do a power walk around the neighbourhood. Try lots of abdominal work-outs and pilates.*

This contribution is insofar unexpected as no other participant has asked for advice in that matter. A further look on MothersSpace shows other discussions on female incontinence at the gym though so that one must assume the topic to be relevant for more women. One of these threads bears the title "HELP! How do you not show erm 'leakage' at the gym????" The initial post reads as follows:

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[3] As McCright and Vannini (2004) pinpoint, the practice of artificial tanning is closely related to other activities centred on the body such as fitness or dieting.

[4] This trend is progressively changing with the proliferation of public 'anti-sunbed' discourses that make aware of the increased risk of skin cancer when using sunbeds though. The Sunbed regulation Act (2010) forbids under-18s to use sunbeds in almost all parts of the UK. (www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/20/, accessed 26.02.2012)

jumpingmouse

> *I have just started doing classes at the local gym. Although I have a quite good pelvic floor (last childbirth is some time ago), I have had a few close calls and am terrified of being mortified by ending up with obvious wet patches by the end of the class. I looked around last week and other women, they are mainly middle aged and upward but all seemed to be ok, wearing tight gym gear, some of it not even dark colours. I wonder how they do it. Do you guys know of any good pads I could wear which won't show as great big bulks though my fitting leggings? I am doing the pelvic floor exercises but in the meantime I need help.*

New to the gym, the participant is "terrified" about a possible humiliation that would occur if she failed to control her bladder. The comparison with other female participants who – to her surprise – do not seem to have the same problem intensifies her fear and marks her as different to the other women in the gym. Here, it is worth drawing on Helen Lewis' (1971) conceptualization of shame as social and relational. She suggests that feelings of embarrassment are originated in a fear of disconnection from others. Shame then can be understand as a response to a perceived threat to the social bond that arises when people feel they have not managed to meet the standards of a given social context regarding what is perceived as normative, desirable, proper or right. We have seen so far in this blog that when many of the women gym users considered in this study communicate their concerns about their gym outfit, body shape, skin colour and continence there is always an element of comparison to others and a realization that one is some sort of a 'misfit'.

Certainly, feelings of falling out of the frame, of not-belonging or doing something that is not quite right are certainly pervasive in most everyday interactions. However, one can argue that these feelings are heightened at the gym where bodies are at the core of all activities and thus under more scrutiny than in other places. This is especially the case during group exercises when through mirrored walls participants are permanently made to look at each other and inevitably compare their bodies, movements and expressions with other members. In such an environment, behaviours or appearances that mark, or appear to mark, one out as different can be spotted very easily so that possible embarrassment must constantly be anticipated and avoided. Yet, there is a second reason why gyms invite feelings of shame: the discourse on personal responsibility for one's

body is inherent to the logics of the gym. The imperative to work upon the embodied self implies that responsibility is to be taken for its failures as well as its successes. It is as if every bodily dysfunction could be 'exercised away', or at least mastered strategically. Where these strategies do not help, where the body's functions cannot be controlled, it is suggested either that bodily dysfunctioning is concealed, or that one refrains from certain activities, from certain ways of dressing or even from attending the gym in general. As mentioned earlier, the online discussion I have presented throughout this chapter predominantly contains advice on how to avoid feelings of uneasiness. The next section will examine the ways in which the gym *outfit* contributes to a strategic corporeal performance on the gym floor.

Maintaining a 'gym-identity' through bodily stylization

In my field work I have found variable degrees of emphasis on bodily stylization in different fitness clubs. Despite training at an upmarket fitness club, members of The Park have a more casual clothing way of dressing than LA Fitness users. In the latter venue outfits are generally tighter, display more skin and the brand logos are more visible. This may be related to the average age of The Park's members (estimated early to late 40s), which is higher than the mean age of LA Fitness (estimated late-20s to mid-30s). Members of low-budget gyms like PureGym or council recreation centres, for that matter, more frequently wear no-brand T-shirts (or "the wide old shirt"), loose tracksuit pants and outdoor sneakers. This difference in 'clothing culture' became apparent to me when I returned to an LA Fitness branch in Highgate for a one-day visit almost two years after my contract had ended. The spatial and temporal distance allowed me to see LA Fitness with fresh eyes. My field notes read as follows:

> *All participants looked better shaped, better dressed and appeared to be more driven (in an intimidating way). Their movements looked faster, steadier, their postures seemed more erect. The entire gym floor had a much more energetic vibe. The not unfamiliar feeling of not being adequately dressed crept in. I felt my outfit (I?) looked boring. Why had I chosen the lame black shirt and these stupid jogging pants (field notes, LA Fitness, 13.11.2013)*

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In retrospect I remembered how much more aware of and concerned with my looks I had been in *my LA Fitness* days. The gym's location (Highgate) and the ages and socio-economic backgrounds of its members are certainly decisive factors when it comes to dressing choices. Also, one can observe that members of gyms that speak to young professionals lay greater emphasis on the performative and aesthetic aspects of exercise. Although a few interviewees state that members may try to conceal their lack of effort and athleticism with a tendency to 'overdo' their appearance, it seems that members are expected to show their commitment to the training via their outfit. Peter says:

> *Peter: I mean sometimes you can tell that people that are dedicated or not, it's sometimes funny because you see some people walking around with actual gym trainers or walking with like, I've seen a guy in sandals once. And you see other people in weird shoes, like skate shoes, worse than these. So you're like confused, some people are decked out with Under Armour and I-pods and everything like that. … There are some people who don't fit in but of course that doesn't mean they can't lift weights.*

Whether a person is devoted or not, this interviewee argues, can be inferred from his or her individual performance and visual display of certain material objects such as an I-pod or well-known sport brands. A further function of the fitness outfit is thus to serve the construction of a certain *gym-identity*. Most of the interviewees implied that there is an 'optimal' degree of bodily stylization. As an interviewee states, one must look neither "dolled up" nor "matchy matchy" nor, as Peter explains, should one wear sandals to the gym. In other words, being over-ambitious in selecting the right outfit calls into question the participant's sincerity to the same degree as an apparent display of laxness does. However, Peter hesitates to make generalizable claims when he says that some gym users "don't fit in but of course that doesn't mean they can't lift weights". He partly takes back and corrects what he has said a few sentences earlier by saying that some people might just *appear* un-athletic through their unfortunate choice of clothing when in reality they are not. Yannick (age 48, not in paid employment) who has been a member for 13 years, reflects upon the performative character of gym exercise as follows:

Yannick: Things like dance classes, people are wearing more street wear, so they might look as if they were going to a rave or something. So they are like with baggy trousers, with those sort of baggy pockets and lots of straps and things like that. Erm they just look cool as I have never looked in my life. I mean you will get older people sometimes wearing their shorts and T-shirt whatever but to be honest most people make a bit of an effort really. And also I think people kind of like to get the right clothing for the type of exercise they are doing and I think, this is me being a bit historical, but it used to be just a bold T-shirt and shorts to go to the gym. But now, if you are doing Zumba there is a certain set of clothing, colourful and yeah, baggy trousers, contrasting colours. Then if you are on the treadmill it's more sombre, perhaps, black. And cycling shorts and all the cycling stuff for spinning. Step classes, a bit of colour but fairly conservative I'd say. I think if you turned up to an Aerobics class with a just a bold shirt and shorts you'd definitely look out of place. So it's up to you if you want to do that but you'll definitely look out of place.

Some of the things this member reports significantly parallel the message conveyed by the gym advert above. Yannick observes that some participants at the gym are dressed in ways that would suit another occasion, for example a rave, far better. Furthermore, she stresses the role of clothing at the gym and states that there are even different style codes for different types of activities. One can expand this observation and add that different types of exercise also call for different types of bodily performance. A Zumba class, for example, calls for a specific type of dress and requires more 'feminine' postures than a step class, which is highly choreographed and requires sharp, controlled movements. By the same token, Zumba teachers often invite participants to smile and cheer during their exercise, invitations which would rarely occur to spinning trainers. The different spaces occupied at the gym, then, call for different externalizations of the self through different stylizations of the body, of which clothes are an important but not the only aspect. It should also be added that for a successful gym performance other 'bodily accessories' seem also to be vital. I have observed that most users bring a minimum of three objects to the gym floor: a towel, a drinking bottle and a MP3 player which are kept close to the body. Online blog discussions show that the scope of the personal front can be much wider. Here, discussants

advise new gym users to bring protein bars, isotonic drinks or weight-lifting gloves to their session.

One of Virgin Active's advertisements exemplifies the gym's performance character well. The title of the advert is "More Pleasure Less Pain". The advert depicts a young, white, slim, attractive woman on a stationary bike, wearing a fitted red dress and high heeled shoes. It mobilizes a stereotypical imaginary of the 'ideal' female as – not visibly in the picture but certainly implied - heterosexual. The makeup, high heels and the revealing dress that hint at her breasts and legs help to enact a certain type of femininity. The point I would like to stress here is the direct link between the performative and aesthetic dimension of gym exercise and the performance of gender, something the advert successfully picks on. The woman depicted is obviously *misplaced*: that is to say, taken from a setting such as a posh party, gala or dinner and 'put' onto the stationary bike. What the viewer sees is not the sweating, exhausted, struggling female gym member who mindlessly stares at the calorie counter or television screen but a made-up, confident and triumphant woman fully enjoying her gym activity. This idealized and unrealistic representation of the gym floor is the advert's main appeal and adds even a comic element to the composition. The message the advert conveys is that the gym floor is a stage which invites its users to deliver a glamorous performance. Crucially, it also suggests that this performance overlaps with the display of gender, sexuality and desire. I would suggest that the same advertisement would not work with a male model wearing a suit and a tie; it functions so well exactly because it takes up the idea of the heteronormative, clichéd female and sexualises her. As stated earlier, one of the reasons most women do not prefer to wear an "old, big shirt" at the gym is because they perceive it as rendering their bodies undesirable. The title of the advert "More Pleasure Less Pain", then, not only connotes the hard work behind exercise but first and foremost the sexual and aesthetic pleasures one will, it is promised, experience at the gym. Bearing in mind that the principal aim of an advert is to encourage people to sign up to a gym contract, the dual promise underlying this advert becomes evident: The image and the title seek to appeal to women by promising them that the gym will turn them into desirable subjects. At the same

time, it seeks to attract men by promising them the pleasure of gazing at these glamorous women.

7.3 Knowing how to act

As Yannick has stated previously, it is very easy to "fall out of frame" at the gym if one fails to follow certain bodily stylizations, and as one may add, bodily conduct. It is not only through adverts and observing other participants that one knows how to conduct one's self. Most gyms I have visited communicate through several channels the behavioural etiquette they expect from the gym user. Usually gyms have a formal code of conduct, published on their websites, to which each customer must agree before signing a contract. With a total of ninety-five rules, Virgin Active has one of the longest lists of regulations relating to the use of equipment, conduct in changing rooms and ways of dressing and behaving on gym premises (Virgin Active, n.d., Club Rules section). Rules prohibit pets, filming or photographing, food or drink purchased from outside the club, the use of equipment for longer than 15 minutes during busy periods, unsuitable attire and alcohol and drugs. During class exercises members are requested not to open the doors while a class is in progress; they are expected to arrive early as "entrance to classes will be barred to anyone arriving more than five (5) minutes late" and to wear "appropriate clean exercise clothing and shoes". It is noted that instructors may ask participants to leave a class if they "are jeopardising the safety or enjoyment of others." In general, users are adviced to conduct themselves

> in a quiet and well-mannered fashion when in or about a Club, and in a manner that will not disturb or impair the use and enjoyment of that Club by any other person. In particular you may not use foul, loud, or abusive language, nor will you behave in a threatening manner nor will you molest, or harass, other Members, guests, visitors, or Members of staff. (Virgin Active, n.d., Club Rules section)

Not all clubs explain in such length and detail how members should conduct themselves. Yet behavioural rules across gyms are organised around the same themes. Frequently, more specific signs setting out behavioural guidelines, as the ones illustrated below, are placed on walls, columns and doors on the gym floor.
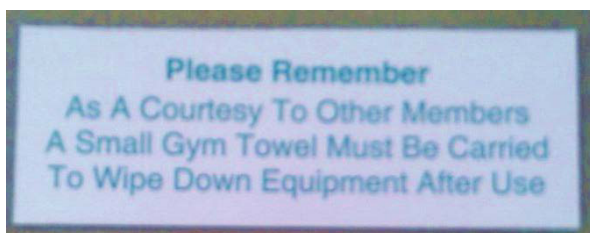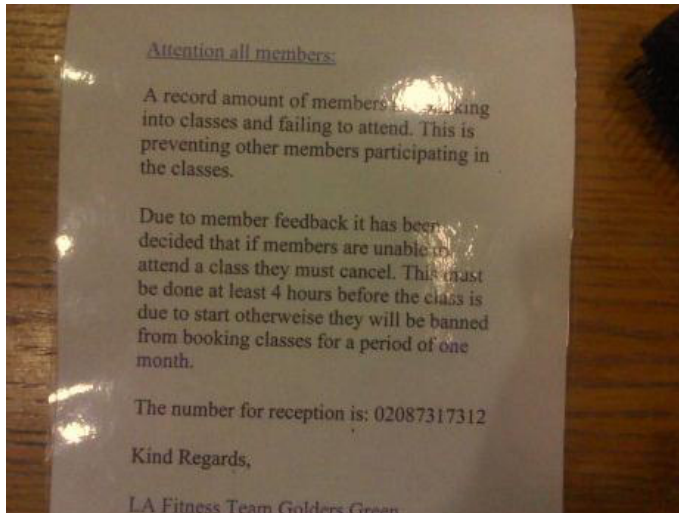
Figures 10-11 Club rules

LA Fitness signs make clear that resources such as lockers or spaces in classes are limited and must not be 'reserved'. These messages additionally list the possible penalties for misbehaviour: participants can be banned from class exercises for a month or fined a ten pounds charge. All three notices endeavour to instil in members the instruction to act or, more precisely, *not* to act in ways that could disadvantage or upset other members. Whether printed on signs or published digitally, all behavioural rules mark the gym out as a place that offers *all* members equal rights and access to its amenities. Whilst the 'official' accounts released by the gym's management appeal to consideration and fair play, online forums enable us to understand the more tacit rules pervasive in the gym environment. The following behavioural codes emerged repeatedly in online blogs:

- Don't stand in other people's way in class or the gym floor.
- Don't ask the teacher extensively and repeatedly about the class.
- Don't interrupt other gym users during their training, don't talk to them whilst they are training and wait for them to pause.
- Don't make noises (no grunting, no weights on the floor).
- Don't occupy the equipment for all too long.
- Don't touch or use other peoples' property (towels, bags etc.).
- Don't stare at other people.

Online discussions point towards a peculiarity of the behavioural etiquette of the gym: all rules seem to be concerned with the occupation of space or, more accurately, seem to recommend against taking up 'too much' space – both in a literal and metaphorical sense. Being sure not to stand in other people's ways or to occupy equipment for too long or to use other member's property, implies that one should not take up too much space and/or 'invade' someone else's personal territory. These three rules are without doubt about the proper and orderly distribution of bodies in space. Rules such as not to "make noise", not to "talk to others whilst they are training" and not to "ask the teacher too extensively about the class" further allude to the factor of time: not only are the spaces at the gym restricted but there are also 'improper' temporalities, such as wrong moments to start a conversation, which are to be avoided. As the last rule emphasizes, the direction of the gaze must also be controlled. During training one is expected to direct one's looks to the immediate surroundings which include the floor, the machine or the mirror. My experience indicates that a brief glance over the gym floor is tolerable but if eye contact between two participants occurs then it is usually dissolved very quickly, either with or without a brief smile or nodding to let the other party know that this look had no further meaning: that is to say, that it should not be understood as judging, offending, harassing or flirting.

The gendered gym floor

One unwritten and unspoken rule to move one's body across the gym is to follow a gender-differentiated pattern of exercise. According to my observations, and echoed in other gym literature, cardio machines are predominantly used by females whilst certain machines are used almost exclusively by men. Almost all female interviewees have reported that they use weight training equipment only irregularly or not at all and some of them have even referred to the weight section as the "men's section". All male interviewees, on the other hand, said that free weights and strength machines are the core part of their training schedule. For most, cardio equipment such as the treadmill or the elliptical is used in warm-up exercises before the actual training with weights. The gendered use of equipment is often reinforced through the very spatiality of the gym environment which, as I argue, motivates a particular behavioural pattern.

As illustrated below (figure 12), PureGym Holloway has a designated stretching and free weights area in front of the female changing room. It is not only for the use of female members but the vast majority of its users are nonetheless women. This semi-detached room cannot be immediately seen from the gym floor and thus provides a certain degree of privacy. LA Fitness in Golders Green even has a separate gym floor for women. It has exactly the same equipment as the main gym floor, which is for both genders. I have frequently observed that there are female members who make use of both gym floors in particular ways: They tend to use the cardio equipment in the main area when there is more of this kind of equipment in this room and the room is more spacious. Weight and stretching exercises, on the other hand, are accomplished in the women-only section. In other words, women members change localities according to the exercise they are doing. Interestingly, I have observed a similar pattern at PureGym. Although there is a free weight area on the first floor, where the majority of the cardio equipment can also be found, most women choose to train with free weights or do sit-ups and squats in the area downstairs.
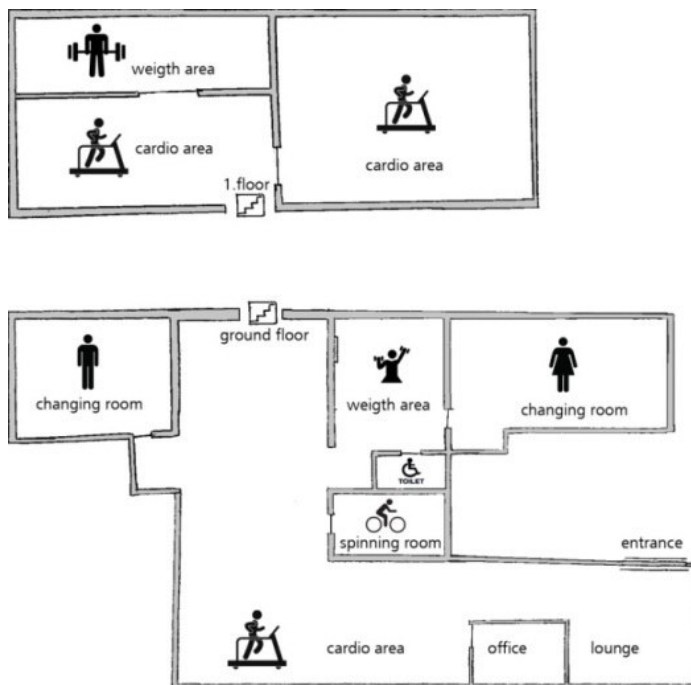

Figure 12 PureGym, floor map

7.4 Group exercise

Group exercise classes at gyms usually take place in a large studio with at least one mirrored wall. The room contains some equipment such as free weights, bars, steps or mats. Classes are led by fitness instructors who demonstrate a series of movements that participants subsequently reproduce. Typically, the pace of bodily movements is regulated by the rhythm of popular upbeat music that accompanies sessions.[5] During the exercise trainers give verbal instructions, count repetitions, remind participants to keep up with the pace and encourage them to work harder (e.g. "Bums up", "Keep those legs higher", "Don't forget to breathe"). These instructions and 'reminders' are not aimed at single individuals but always at the group as a whole. Only very rarely do trainers correct the postures and movements of single clients. This usually happens during floor exercises when other participants cannot see who is being singled out as their gazes are directed towards the ceiling. There are classes that are frequented almost exclusively by women (e.g. Zumba[6]), predominantly by women (e.g. Aerobics, Step), or by both genders to the same extent (e.g. Spining, BoxFit). During my fieldwork I have not witnessed a class that was predominantly or exclusively visited by men. High-intense classes such as BoxFit or Spinning tend to attract members in their 20s and 30s, whilst Zumba, Aerobics and Yoga classes display a wider age spectrum including participants in their 50s and 60s.

The positioning of bodies in the studio

Participants usually arrive in the studio a few minutes before the class starts. As it is vital to follow the instructor's move, participants are usually keen to secure a position from where they can see both the trainer and their own reflection in the mirror. I have observed that the majority of clients are reluctant to occupy a place in the first row or immediately in front of the trainer. This often results in a situation in which the second and third rows are filled quickly but the area just in front of the trainer tends to remain empty. As a reaction to that, there are sometimes half-joking, half-serious discussions between the fitness instructor and

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[5] Exceptions are classes such as Yoga, Pilates or stretching where down-tempo 'New Age' music is being played.

[6] During my participant observation I have witnessed one instance where a male participant was participating at a Zumba class.

the participants where the group is being asked to move two metres forward and participants making only one reluctant step and grin at the instructor. Generally, participants locate their bodies in the studio space according to their ability to perform, or more precisely, their ability to mimic the trainer's movements as accurately as possible. Hence, the back rows (and here especially both ends) are, usually, made up of members who are new to this type of class exercise or too self-conscious to position themselves closer to the instructor and the mirrors. My observations in the field are similar to those made by Maguire and Mansfield (1998) outlined in Chapter 1: spaces in the front of the mirrors are usually occupied by the best performers of the class. There are one or two participants in each class that are very keen to occupy a place in the first row and unsurprisingly, these members have well-shaped bodies and no difficulties in following the instructions of the trainer. Some display almost the same degree of bodily control and eloquence as the trainer herself. I witnessed some occasions where those 'first row occupants' also physically resembled the fitness instructor, that is to say, in regards to her muscle contours, clothing and hair style. These members did occasionally take up the role of a co-trainer: generally, as the instructor stands with her back to the mirror her movements are mirror-inverted and those in the back rows can find it easier to follow the movements of their fellow participants rather than the steps of the fitness instructor.

Corporeal affinities

My own long-time experience in various classes suggests that the choreographed and synchronized way of employing bodies yields a certain 'we-feeling' with both the trainer and the fellow participants. To unpack this phenomenon it is worthwhile to look at the role of synchronized group exercise in recent history. Synchronized mass movements played an important role in many regions of Europe during the 19th century, especially in Germany, Austria and Scandinavia (Eichberg, 1995; Krüger, 1995; Weber, 1995). In the 20th century mass gymnastics displays were mainly employed by totalitarian regimes in fascist and communist countries (e.g. the Nuremberg Rallies in the Third Reich or the Czech nationalist Sokol movement; see Raubal, 2003 for an in-depth analysis), and continue to do so into the 21th century (e.g. in China or North Korea). Whilst the meanings of mass gymnastic rituals certainly differed according to the political

and historical context in which they emerged, they had nonetheless a common political function, namely to embody identification with the nation-state and express loyalty to its leadership. Raubal (2003) writes that mass gymnastic performances in fascist and communist countries demonstrated characteristics such as strength, youth, beauty and discipline which were meant to represent the nature of the entire nation. Furthermore, "mass body language had the capacity to express the positive feeling of community and social solidarity" (Raubal, 2003, p.3). It promoted egalitarianism and non-competiveness which was also reflected in the obligatory uniforms that were employed during mass gymnastic parades.[7]

What distinguishes class exercises at the gym from the public performances of nationalist regimes is first and foremost their non-ideological framing. The gym is far from having an explicit political or social agenda.[8] Nonetheless feelings of belonging may be similar to feelings generated at political parades. One may hypothesize that when multiple bodies move in a coordinated and synchronized way they bring about a certain experience of 'togetherness' and 'sameness'. What is also similar between these otherwise different modes of group gymnastics is the aesthetic pleasure one gains from participation in choreographed exercise. The discipline and docility required for this type of aesthetic experience to emerge are reminiscent of rehearsals for a group performance, or even military training. The clapping of hands at the end of the class further underlines the performative, and parade-like, dimension of group exercise – a parade that has in the place of an audience the mirror image of those who perform it.

Based on a fieldwork study in Canadian fitness centres MacNevin (1999) argues that participants enjoy the collective dimension and non-competitive atmosphere of group exercise most. Indeed, as I have just put forward there is an element of sociability in group exercise but I would argue that it is different from what MacNevin has in mind. It is not camaraderie in its conventional sense (e.g. like in team sports) but a corporeal and kinesthetic relationality with one an other, an

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[7] It should be noted that gymnastic parades excluded those who were not considered as part of the nation. Hence the display of democratic egalitarism was accompanied by discriminatory and racist politics (see also Raubal ,2003).

[8] In Chapter 8 I will show that the gym nonetheless operates as a political force, or as it might be called, a *technology of the self*. However, its logics and strategies differ from the nation-state agendas discussed here.

attempt to establish what might be called 'inter-bodily affinity'. One's individual success and enjoyment during group exercise is measured by the extent to which one manages to copy the instructor and synchronize with others. This, as I would suggest, induces a desire to belong and to be 'just like the others' on a corporeal level. However, my participant observation also suggests that this type of *corporeal affinity* involves constant comparing and contrasting and leads to subtle rivalries amongst participants.

Competitiveness and rivalry

The very fact that one constantly gazes at one's own mirror image in line next to others, yields almost automatically a comparison between one's own body and its abilities and the bodies of others. Agnes, a regular gym user in her late 40s says:

> *Agnes: You do compare yourself a bit. Obviously. I do sometimes think "Hang on, she is got two rises on her step". Things like "She lost weight" or "I am actually looking fatter". I mean you don't do it a lot but obviously - - of course you do. As you get older, as it's happening to me. It's not the best view in the mirror you know. You then look at other people and think, it would be lovely to be young and slim again.*

Agnes points out that there is the element of comparison, especially as "you get older". But female interviewees in their 20s or 30s reported similar thoughts and feelings. Typical thoughts I had during my field work in classes were "How often would I need to train to have a body like her?", "I'd like to have her upper arm muscles", "At least, I am not that overweight" or "Why does she place herself in front of me when it's clear that she has never done this before?". This comparative element can turn into a subtle rivalry when it comes to more difficult movements that require either a higher degree of flexibility, co-ordination, stamina or endurance. I have experienced instances in which the instructor showed a rather sophisticated movement that most of the class found hard to follow. As mentioned earlier, each class tends to have two or three participants who have a more pronounced ability to follow the movements of the instructor. Usually these are the ones who manage to accomplish such tasks without any visible sign of struggling. These participants are likely to evoke feelings of admiration in the rest

of the group. Sometimes their enthusiastic performance bears some 'showing off' elements, for example when they half-smile into their own mirror image or look into the trainer's eyes in search for praise.

Generally speaking, participants in a class appear to be uninterested in and unperceiving of the other members. During class exercise, for example, most participants rarely direct their glances towards others: they look either at the trainer or at their own mirror image. As a certain level of pain and discomfort are considered vital to the work-out, facial expressions in most classes communicate personal effort and seriousness. Even when drink bottles or towels are taken up, participants rarely look around or engage in conversation. They fixate the object of use, walk straight towards it (which sometimes results in light collisions with co-participants) and accomplish their activity in a quick, effective and purposeful way. It seems to be acceptable to exchange some mutual looks and little smiles at the beginning or end of the training or, alternatively, between sets to communicate the difficulty of the exercise (e.g. with a short, overdramatized sigh or humorous eye rolling). Those participants who engage others in longer conversation are glanced at dismissively though. In some exceptional cases, the teacher may even reprimand a participant, which results in embarrassed looks from everyone in the class, including the person who has been 'told off'. However, my field notes show that the boundaries between inattention and ignorance can be blurred, or more precisely, that the former can transform into the latter.

> *There was a rather unusual incident during the Step class this morning. A female participant in her early 50s stopped in the middle of the session to grab her dink or towel- something one usually wouldn't do without the instructions of the trainer. She was in the first row, just across the trainer and thus visible to most of the others. She did that a couple of times, stopped and rested every few minutes. She looked very exhausted, had a red face, sweating a lot. Then she stopped entirely and sat down on her step. It was then that I realized that her step was on the highest level which was just unsuitable for her height as she wasn't taller than 1.50m, maybe even shorter. Almost out of reflex, I run towards her (which meant I had to cross half of the room) and said: "You can put your step lower, it will be easier. That's what I do". She nodded without words, did what I had suggested and continued with the exercise. After class she came to me and said "Thank you. I didn't know you can adjust the Step. I have asthma and difficulties in breathing". I was happy - and proud - to have helped her but at the same time upset about the instructor who surely had seen the struggling women too but chose not to intervene." (field notes, PureGym, 02.03.2013)*

Actually, there were a few instances in which I found the trainer to be rather ignorant, or careless about the participants of the class. Most trainers seem to "perform their show" and then leave the room without being interested in whether members liked the class, whether they found it too easy or too difficult, have questions etc. The only question about participants' well-being is the query whether there are any injuries or pregnancies right before the class begins – a question that I interpreted more as an obligatory professional gesture to avoid legal issues rather than a genuine interest.

7.5 Changing rooms or "The shock of the locker room"

Sassatelli (2010) qualifies changing rooms in fitness clubs from a Goffmanian perspective as 'backstage' regions and the gym floor as 'frontstage', respectively. According to Goffman (1959):

> the back region of a performance is located at one end of the place where the performance is presented, being cut off from it by a partition and guarded passageway…In general, of course, the back region will be the place where the performer can reliably expect that no member of the audience will intrude (Goffman, 1959, p. 113)

It is here that the "performer can relax, drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character" (Goffman, 1959, p. 112). The spatial segregation of the changing room, the act of dressing and undressing as well as other preparatory practices lend themselves to such a reading. However, my observations as well as the interview material demonstrate that participants do not stop performing and regulating their bodies once they enter the locker room. On the contrary, due the assemblage of naked and semi-naked bodies in this confined, shared arena the body and its function become a delicate matter. Hence, bodily practices, gazes, postures are employed even more carefully than in the other sites of the gym. One of the repeated observations I made in female changing rooms is that women who come into the room conversing tend to continue their conversation up until the point where they start taking off their shirt or trousers, that is, when their

underwear gets exposed. In other words, whilst they exchange words and make eye contact when opening their lockers, take out their stuff or put off their shoes they stop direct interaction once they start undressing. Here, they act in a quick, purposeful and focused way, often facing to the locker and standing with their backs to the others present in the room. Conversation is usually taken up again once they have covered their bodies with a towel and start walking together to the showers. At LA Fitness I often felt 'trapped' and constantly under the risk of being 'caught' naked by a fully covered person. Especially when I came out from the shower and a larger group of people arrived to 'invade' the changing room with chatter, sweaty bodies and hasty movements I felt somehow at unease.

What becomes explicit here is that bodily closeness and exposure, especially with and to strangers, can be experienced as disturbing. The reasons for this are manifold: first, getting undressed in front of anonymous others is an exceptional state in a society in which the bare body is typically associated with sexuality or illness. Except in saunas, gyms and other exercise and wellness-related establishments, our bodies are rarely displayed for others outside the bed-, bath- or sickroom. The ways of acting in the bathroom or bedroom of one's home are largely suspended in the locker room. My uneasiness with groups entering the changing room whilst I was getting dressed had partly to do with the unpredictability of this encounter: I had no control over who would come in or direct her gaze at my exposed body. Additionally, because public nudity is regarded as shameful in our society, shame is not just an emotion that the person being looked at may experience but also the person who is looking. What I was trying to avoid, then, was not only my own embarrassment but also the embarrassment of the other person.

Gyms orchestrate corporeal practices in locker rooms predominantly through spatial means. At The Park changing areas are kept strictly separate from the shower cabins and the toilets. The changing zone is spread out into three distinct rooms: The room on one side has a large playpen in the middle indicating that it is assigned to caregivers with children. At the corner of this room is a door leading to a smaller compartment with a sign that states that children are not allowed to be there. Both rooms have a few changing cubicles and lead to the same showering

area. Additionally, there is a third room that has two changing cubicles and four shower cabins that can be locked. This room is clearly separated from the other areas and provides a higher degree of privacy. Certainly, The Park's changing facilities are exceptional. All other gyms I have visited had a much more open changing zone, with less walled-in zones and changing cubicles. The showers at council sponsored or low-cost gyms are often built into the changing zone so that no walls separate the changing area from the showers. Some of these sites have communal showers, sometimes with and sometimes without curtains. The lack of a curtain means that the body is on display during the entire self-cleaning procedure. In those instances, I have observed two common strategies with which participants seek to gain a little more private space in these locales: Some turn around and face the wall whilst showering which means that although others can see their back, the genitals remain unseen. A second tactic is self-absorption: Here, participants concentrate on the activity at hand and mentally 'switch off', that is, disengage from the surroundings (e.g. by looking aloof). Both strategies guarantee that one is not directly aware of potential looks and thus feels less under scrutiny. It can be argued that what one buys with the higher membership fee is the opportunity to withdraw one's body from the gaze of others. The more 'fortified' physical set-up in exclusive gyms suggests that 'upper-class bodies' are to be handled more discreetly than other bodies and are entitled to more privacy and protection. By the same token, it implies the thought that some bodies are more respectable than others, or, that upper-class members should be afforded more shelter, protected from the possibility of shame-inducing encounters.

A different universe full of bodies

When I asked my interviewees about their changing and showering habits some have noted that they needed to accommodate to these:

> *Ceren: Do you take a shower at the gym?*
>
> *Boris: Yes, usually. And actually, now we are talking about it. Another shock for me, because I am not a physical, bodily, sport's person. I have never been. My only sports are mental. My brain is Arnold Schwarzenegger inside (laughing). But my body, no. It was the shock of the locker room. Because all these people getting naked very easily. I mean I understood that's how you do it. But I haven't*

been going to the army, I am not used to it. Maybe it was kind of a novelty thing. So, that was a bit surprising. I got into it fast, immediately. It was a different universe full of bodies and people and you know. The non-erotic kind of. Just I don't know the presence of human bodies. Does that make sense? It's just people don't notice it. It's natural for them. They are like la la la (mimicking people getting undressed).

Ceren: Did you to get used to that?

Boris: No, I mean, I accommodated, well because it's nothing, it wasn't threatening, it wasn't directed at me, I felt. And even if, I use my towel - which I do - no one is looking. I mean it's very nice, you observe it but it doesn't require you actively. It's like you are going on and you are like "Yeah, ohh, strip!" <laughing>.

This account exemplifies how new members can experience the locker room as a rather alienating site, especially if they have not used communal changing and showering facilities in other contexts before. Boris (age 28, post-doc fellow) tellingly calls the changing room a "different universe full of bodies" in which the shame frontier that is conventionally associated with human nakedness is suspended. This is, Boris seems to imply, due to the body's non-eroticized and "natural" framing in this particular setting. And indeed, respondents from both genders repeatedly pointed towards the non-sexual atmosphere in changing rooms. Yet, there are, somewhat paradoxically, good reasons to assume that this is not quite the case. Boris states that he accommodated to the changing room rather quickly as he felt it was not "threatening" or "directed" towards him. What we are seeing foreshadowed here is the *possibility* of an erotic or sexual element in the locker room. Boris grants by negation the option that other bodies might indeed be 'threatening', that is to say, desiring or desirable. He himself is actually not entirely convinced of the 'innocence' of the changing room either. In his last few sentences he states that "even if" there was sexually charged atmosphere, he considers himself to be warranted against it as he covers his body with towels. In other words, he implies that others may look at his naked body in a sexually desiring way and in order to prevent this, he uses a towel. On the other hand, the stripping analogy, cheerfully pointed out by Boris, alludes to the exhibitionistic

pleasures of undressing in front of others. The following excerpt by Eric bears some parallels with Boris' account:

Eric: You know at my old gym one guy was staying in the shower for long long long long time. And he looked a little bit aroused and the curtain wasn't closed. It was that kind of thing happening. Erm I think my gym feels a bit more family oriented. There is not so much of that. Erm there is a difference between closed doors and open doors in showers and being delicate about how to avoid someone.

What Eric clearly implies here is that the participant was actually enjoying being looked at nakedly and that's why he did not draw the curtain. He also seems to assume that this kind of exhibitionist bodily display occurs more typically in some gyms rather than others. Akin to Boris, Eric is ambivalent though: on the one hand, he consolidates himself by saying that in his family-oriented gym, bodies are not related to in eroticized ways. On the other hand, he stresses the importance of avoiding people who might think and act otherwise. It is interesting to note that Eric considers family-oriented places, that is, places frequented by parents and their children, to be less prone to eroticization. This is at odds with two of the rules Virgin Active that suggest indirectly that children's bodies can as well be regarded as sexually provocative:

44. Only one individual is permitted in a shower cubicle at any one time (with the exception of a parent or guardian who may take his/her own child aged up to 8 years into a shower cubicle with him/her).

75. Child Members, under the age of 9, may change in either sex changing room, under supervision, and in designated areas only. Child Members aged 9-15 years must change in designated areas, under supervision, in the changing room of their own sex. (Virgin Active, n.d., Club Rules section)

That caregivers are not permitted to share a shower cubicle with a child above eight years of either gender implies that the pubescent body can be an object of adult homo- and heterosexual desire. The second rule positions the child body additionally as potentially desiring: Whilst it is acceptable for boys and girls to use the changing room of the opposite gender until the age of eight, they must go

to the changing room of their own gender after the age of nine. Both the interview excerpts and the gym rules demonstrate that the locker room is an ambiguous place. It contains always the possibility being sexually charged. Thus, the abovementioned segmentation of the changing zone through walls can help to keep away potential homoerotic tensions amongst members.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter dealt primarily with what the presence of 'others' and their bodies may mean at the gym. The interactions and performances on the gym floor and the changing room have shown that certain bodily enactments are employed and certain clothing is opted for to avoid potential embarrassments, both of one's self and of the other. The second area I focused upon in this chapter was concerned with the gendered patterns of bodily display. Here, I analysed both the spatial segmentation of a club and an advertisement, suggesting that gym produces normalizing effects in terms of sexuality, desire and the performance of femininities. Relatedly, interactional dynamics of and performances during group exercise suggest that encouraged synchronization of behaviour brings about a corporeal affinity with the trainer and fellow participants whereas competiveness seems to be part of this process, too. As Scott (2011) writes, people who subscribe to institutions in order to create better version of themselves, are strongly dependent on "mutual surveillance". The more they are monitored by others, one could think, the more disciplined they become and the greater their success will be. However, mutual surveillance results almost automatically in a comparison between one's own body and the bodies of others. It my then cause feelings of rivalry and even shame about one's own perceived bodily inadequacies when one fails to 'fit in' properly. This may yield to putting more effort into the gym regimen, and to working harder on the 'right' outfit, movements and attitudes in order to create the 'optimal' self.

8

The self as an enterprise

In this chapter, I discuss to what extent gym exercise enables a stylization of a particular life and confirms and expresses one's sense of self. In the first part of this chapter I argue that gym exercise can be qualified as an indefinite, life-long project as bodies are discursively constructed as imperfect, requiring on-going maintenance. Following this, I show that certain up-market gyms might be characterized as aspirational spaces, that is, places that are sought after by participants because they generate a feeling of upward mobility and exclusiveness. I conclude this chapter with a theoretically informed discussion of the concept of the 'entrepreneurial self' as formulated by Foucault and discuss the extent to which it could be applied to the practices of gym training within a neoliberal context. It is noted that some participants have some an awareness of the gym's attempt to perpetuate the discourse of 'the self as an enterprise', and are resistant to taking it up.

8.1 The gym as life-long project

"Individuals", Rose writes, "are to become entrepreneurs of themselves, shaping their own lives through the choices they make" (Rose, 1999, p.230). That interventions regarding the body are part of this 'self-enterprise' has been argued by many authors (Gimblin, 2002; Phillips, 2005; Shilling, 2012; Turner, 2008). Shilling, for example, argues that "the position of the body in contemporary culture is indicative of a degree of reflexivity towards the body and identity that is, arguably, without precedent" (Shilling, 2012, p.2). Gym related body work as a way of altering and working upon one's physicality is in many respects different from other body modification techniques. Interferences with the body, such as in cosmetic surgery or weight loss diets, typically have a starting point with a self-defined problem, and its solution, in mind; they imply a procedure with a well-defined, expected outcome. At the gym, such goals exist, too, however, in a far more fluid and continually altered way. It is only in exceptional cases that participants use the gym as part of a clear body project and cancel their membership after achieving their goals. To the query, "Do you think you would at

some point stop going to the gym?" the majority of my participants replied that they would not:

> *Boris: I wouldn't like to leave it [the gym]. Now that I'm into it, I will, I think, forever be doing something like this. But forever is a long time <laughing>.*
>
> ---
>
> *Joanna: No, I don't think I would. I will probably be exercising till the end of my life.*

Although Boris (age 28, post-doc fellow) has taken up his fitness regime to lose weight, which means that he adheres to a clear goal, cancelling the membership is hardly an option for him. And yet, as Boris' humorous attitude signals, he seems to think that he will finally give it up, but more out of idleness than of anything else. Joanna (age 30, assistant in a law firm) similarly asserts that the gym is not something that has an endpoint. That both interviewees use rather unrealistic time frames for their gym membership ("forever" and "the end of my life") indicates that the gym requires strong commitment and continuity. There is the sense that the gym is somehow a life-long project. One of the reasons this might be the case is that bodily alterations achieved through gym exercise are temporary. Aaron (age 34, security staff) who initially joined the gym to grow muscles explains:

> *Aaron: (…) I haven't been to the gym for the past six months and I'm thinking now I've lost all the weight I gained, I've lost all the muscles, and I'm forced to sign up to the gym again. I'm like 'oh man'.*

This quote illustrates the pressure some may feel to maintain what they have once achieved through hard work. If participants fail to continue their exercise regime there is the danger that the body 'relapses' into its former state. Another, perhaps more relevant reason the gym is perceived as a life-long project is the ambiguity of the notion of 'fitness' itself. It escapes a unified operationalization and is open to various meanings. Does being fit mean being able to jog 16 kilometres an hour, to lift 50kg at once, to have a muscle mass of 42%? And is there an optimal state where one is the 'fittest', with no room for improvement? Because there are no definite answers to these questions, and because there is not a static or final end-

point when it comes to physical fitness, participants are continually working towards *something*. This 'something' cannot be put into definite terms, and therefore remains vague (e.g. 'getting fitter'), or, as is more often the case, it continuously needs to be re-defined. In those cases where participants have concrete goals, such as being able to run a marathon in a given time, they do not quit their gym membership after having achieved these goals but search for novel fitness challenges, that is, they re-define the rationale for their gym membership. What seems to be the case is that the body is characterized by imperfectability in its literal sense; it needs constant attention and on-going maintenance through an ever-expanding number of different fitness techniques. This is perhaps the reason why gyms intermittently implement new classes, new machines and new fitness concepts. Fitness training at the gym can, then, be understood as an example of an 'indefinite discipline', that, with Foucault (1977) is,

> an interrogation without end, an investigation that would be extended without limit to a meticulous and ever-more analytical observation, a judgement that would at the same time be the constitution of a file that was never closed. (Foucault, 1977, p.227)

If the gym sends out the message that the 'body file' ought never to be closed because there are always more minute and more precise bodily interventions to be made and higher states of health, fitness and emotional well-being to be achieved, one may speculate whether the gym is only about the actual results that one gets from working out, or whether training at the gym has other functions, too.

8.2 The gym as an indicator of personality and lifestyle

Here, it is worth extending and refining the notion of 'membership'. As stated in Chapter 6, the notion of 'membership' typically denotes one's belonging, or one's desire to belong, to a social group that one identifies with. As a gym user one is not only a member of a particular gym but also of the group of gym-goers. The idea of space-identity is useful to think with here. If spaces and places "take on a symbolic significance around which identities are constituted and performed", as Hetherington (1998, p.106) puts forward, one may ask whether one's membership of the gym signifies that one is a certain type of person who identifies with the

roles, norms and values that are associated with this particular site. Rosie's statement is indicative of such a function of the gym:

> *Rosie: (…) I guess it's like buying into intent of a particular lifestyle. (…) I feel like with gyms, people by paying the money, by joining the gym, they are buying into this sort of thing to improve their lives.*

In Rosie's (age 24, post-graduate student) terms, perhaps more important than exercise, it is the gym membership and the gym ritual as such that make people believe that they are a certain, and better, type of person. Building on the argument made in Chapter 5, we see here not only that participants tend to think of the gym as positively affecting their lives, turning them into more efficient, successful and psychologically resilient individuals, but also that owning a membership and going to the gym *qua* leisure ritual can function as an indicator of a certain identity.

Featherstone (1987) writes that people from all ages and class backgrounds tend to be preoccupied with the stylization of the self. This, he argues, can be understood as a life project where people "display their individuality and sense of style in the particularity of assemblage of goods, clothes, practices, experiences, appearance and bodily dispositions" (Featherstone, 1987, p.59). Indeed, the gym, as it can be noted, is a cross-class leisure pastime: members come from a wide range of ages, ethnicities, social classes etc.[1] The perception that the gym is an indicator of a certain lifestyle can go so far that people from a certain social strata and occupational background may even feel obliged to participate. Alexander (age 28, sales manager) reports that the gym was akin to a social duty for him:

> *Alexander: (…) And when I moved to London things started to change because suddenly I wasn't working out to be healthy; I was doing it for other reasons and it suddenly became sort of like something I had to do (…) So I remember like, I never really got to like the gym, but it was something I did pretty much every day, because I had to, like this is something people do, like a social obligation I guess.*

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[1] As I will also show below, this does not mean that different gyms do not address different social classes. It merely means that the gym qua leisure activity is not limited to a particular, affluent class but taken up by various social strata.

Alexander's description of the gym as a social obligation, as "something people do" must be understood in the context of his personal history. After his studies in a small North American city, he took up a job in a company in London. The company has a corporate membership with a club nearby. Most of his male colleagues went to the gym a few times a week and he felt that in order to fit into this particular 'London-lifestyle' (and to perform 'proper' masculinity, as we might add), and in order to adjust to his new environment, he felt obliged to take up this particular hobby. Gyms, then, can be said to provide environments in which people not only work upon their bodies but with it, also on their subjectivities, trying to create and maintain a certain 'version' of their selves. The next section examines what these 'versions' imply, that is to say, what preferred definitions of the self are being generated at the gym.

8.3 Gym exercise as a performative act

Adapting Butler's (1990) view that identities are performatively constructed and must repetitively be enacted through speech and action in order to substantiate themselves, we may ask to what extent gym exercise can be understood as a ritualized performative act. Rituals, as it has been noted, are employed by social groups mainly for two reasons: first, to demarcate themselves from other groups (such as other cultures, religions, ethnicities etc.) and second, to reinforce group attachment and group cohesion (Bell, 2009; Platvoet & Van Der Toorn, 1995). Put bluntly, collective, ritual behaviour can be said to be a means by which social identities are constructed and sustained.

It should be noted that none of my participants suggested that the gym provided them with a distinctive sense of identity. However, some interviewees commented critically on how gyms seek to establish that link – a discourse they had personally refused to take up. Shawn, for example, is a member of Third Space and describes this site as:

> *Shawn: The club is very sleek and cool, some of the exercise rooms are decorated with purple lights, like a night club (…). The place promotes this kind of yuppie lifestyle. You have got the job, you have the cool gym, you have this and that.*

The Third Space member, so the spatiality of the place seems to suggest, is a young white-collar professional who cannot only afford to have an expensive gym membership but who also has a certain number of other attributes that are associated with an upper-middle class urban lifestyle. When I ask Kate what her 'perfect' gym would be like she contrasts it to her current gym, emphasizing that membership of a certain club can be a marker of social identity:

> *Kate: (…) I would prefer a gym that is not about how it looks, having the latest machinery and all, like aesthetically looking very cool, urban and hip but just like people that are just there to work out and aren't focussed on images. In a sense, it's very funny, Virgin Active, the one I go to, is very image-oriented ... It's mostly young, professional crowd that's who goes there mostly … I think some people go to maintain image and appearance and this gym specifically promotes this nouveau, sophisticated very hip and cool and – I mean you walk into the gym and everything is white, it's not functional at all.*

Although Kate (age 40, administrator) is a white professional herself, she does not wish to identify with these identity categories; she seems to refuse to take on the role of the hip and sophisticated individual. In Bourdieu's terms (1981, p.309), she is not willing to "enter into the spirit of the social character which is expected of them [here: the gym members] and which they expect of themselves". Kate's account prompts us to think that gyms can be *aspirational spaces*, that is, spaces that invoke the sense in people that they have bettered themselves and moved 'up' as well as 'out' of their own social class and thus obtained a more desirable social standing (Watt, 2007). By signing up to up-market gyms people may feel as if they were wealthier and more sophisticated than they actually are. Employing the vocabulary of heterotopia, the gym might speak to 'utopian' dreams and hopes of a better-off life that many people may hold. However, that the gym may not always work as an aspirational space is illustrated in the following field note entry. It captures the effect the membership at the up-market fitness club The Park – with membership fees that I could not really afford - had on me:

> *I feel a bit conflicted about The Park. I quite like it there, I feel strangely 'safe' and comfortable. Everything smells good, I get warm towels, the equipment is of high quality, it's clean, spacious, it has a large pool, a comfortable lounge area.*

The club is like a getaway from the cold and dirty flat I live in, the broken shower with too little water pressure. But at the same time I feel somehow betrayed–especially when I'm leaving the club and walking to the bus stop. I see all the fancy cars of the other members with which they will drive to their likewise nice, comfy houses in the fancy neighbourhoods. I know I am not really part of this all (…) (field notes, The Park, 08.03.2011)

What my subjective experience of content on the one hand and uneasiness on the other indicates is the persistency with which The Park assumes not only distinctive life-styles, but also distinctive individuals. The material environment and the décor of the fitness club, that is, the warm towels, the nice smell, the wooden floors and the solid furniture speak of wealth; the colour used of the interior are not flashy but held in sober, creamy tones, signalling sophistication and the spatial layout can even be described as deliberately unpretentious. There is a sense that this is a 'cultivated' place. As my field notes show, I enjoy the feeling of material prosperity and security the club perpetuates. For the duration of my stay, I feel part of that privileged world. But I am also aware that The Park does not resemble my usual habitat, my own material conditions of existence; I know that I am not *really* one of them, that my enjoyment of being there is based on 'fake' premises - and this is not just because I am the researcher and 'they' the research subjects. It is because they have fancy cars and houses waiting for them outside the club whilst I am taking the bus and the tube back to my shared flat in North London. In my account is a sense of not-belonging, of being out-of-place together with feelings of resentment, jealousy and self-pity. It might well be the case that there are other people who are in a similar situation and who have a similar experience. They may also feel out-of-place at The Park and at the same time, they may desire to attain a particular lifestyle which the gym enables one to vicariously achieve, at least for the time one is on the premises.

8.4 The car, the house, the membership

The Park cannot be said to be an easily accessible place. This is not just due to its high membership fees but also due to the identity categories it presupposes. To elaborate upon how *physical* space can function as a resource for identity Dixon and Durrheim (2000) adopt an explicitly spatial outlook in conjunction with a

discursive perspective. They introduce the notion of the 'grounds of identity' as "a social construction that allows them [subjects] to make sense of their connectivity to place and to guide their actions and projects accordingly" (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000, p. 32). If a participant does not 'fit into' a particular fitness club, if she is not accustomed to the practices taken for granted there, feelings of dis-connection, resentment or jealousy are likely to occur (see also Chapter 7). Here, it is useful to revisit, and expand on, one of Foucault's criteria of heterotopia that is concerned with the regulations of entrances and exits of places. As he emphasizes, access to places are often accompanied by *rites de passages* where the subject needs to undergo a certain ritual that gives her the 'right' to enter. Whilst exits and entries are typically regulated through physical means such as doors, fences, or gateways one can also look for non-literal meanings of the terms. Based on my own experience at The Park it is my contention that entries and exits are also regulated on an embodied and practical level.

To speak with Bourdieu, the very materiality of the setting presupposes a certain *habitus,* a 'feel for the game' that itself can function as a barrier when one has not acquired it (Bourdieu, 1977). There might be a mismatch between one's own habitus and the habitus expected and promoted at The Park. To recall, Bourdieu foregrounds with this concept the social, and more precisely, the class-based dimension of embodied action and argues that the habitus has a large impact on thought and affect. The metaphors Bourdieu uses - an 'orchestra without a conductor' or a 'train laying its own rails' - underline the intentionality, but not necessarily the conscious agency, through which habitus operates. Hence, one may feel discomfort and shame without knowing exactly what has provoked those feelings. The presence of beauticians, physiotherapists, Jacuzzis, steam rooms, cafés and restaurants, for example, suggest 'appropriate' ways of spending leisure time and encourage very particular ways of treating the body. Seemingly little things such as body lotion flacons, make-up remover pads and cotton swabs, for example, presuppose existing cosmetic interventions. The vast parking zone, the club-owned nursery and the children's playing area presume a particular lifestyle that takes car ownership and offspring for granted. Meredith expresses her own stance towards the dominant image her gym portrays as follows:

Meredith: It's mostly society saying that in order to fit in, or put your life together you need to have a gym membership just as you have a house, the best car, the spouse, the best children. If you are part of the really nice gym that has a spa and things like that. The more I talk about the gym the more I realize how much I hate it <laughing>

Although Meredith is *de facto* a member of an up-market club herself she questions and distances herself from the normative discourse her gym perpetuates. She explains that her gym seeks to be part of a more general, class-dependent set of practices, providing individuals with seemingly 'naturalized' ways of being, materialized in a house, a car, a spouse and children. Meredith critically comments on how dominant images of upper middle-class, (and heteronormative) ways of life become contingent on a discourse about the 'good life'. In order to have a 'normal' life, that is, in order to fit in, so the dominant discourse goes, one needs to be a member of a distinctive fitness gym.

But it is not just the up-market locales that seek to establish that link between gym participation and lifestyle. PureGym, to take an illustrative example, promotes a certain image of the typical goer, too. Here, the club deploys similar strategies like The Park. To remember, PureGym's monthly membership fee of £20 to £25 addresses a clientele with a lower buying power. Given that the gym offers only the most basic and 'essential' services the notion of 'pure' has a clear socio-economic reference. PureGym forgoes abundance but provides merely the minimum and absolute necessary means required for fitness training. There is no reception desk to welcome clients; a proper sitting area and a cafeteria to socialize are also missing. The absence of such spaces communicates that there is no need to exchange 'pleasantries', no need to engage in activities other than plain, or 'pure' exercise. By a similar token, the absence of a pool, a sauna or a beautician suggests that one does not need to devote meticulous attention to the body and personal appearance; it can be interpreted as a rejection of everything that is not functional which is, actually, part of the club's ethos. It proves that what one gets here is simple, straightforward, functional training without any 'bells and whistles'. To invoke Bourdieu again, what the relative lack of body care facilities at PureGym in comparison to The Park alludes to is

that the body is the most indisputable materialization of class taste…which express in countless ways a whole relation to the body, i.e., a way of treating it, caring for it, feeding it, maintaining it, which reveals the deepest dispositions of the habitus… and also, of course, through the uses of the body in work and leisure which are bound up with them, that the class distribution of bodily properties is determined. (Bourdieu, 1984, p.190)

The relation to and treatment of the body, Bourdieu refers to here, can also be traced back on an interactional level. Personal trainers, for example, tend to be louder, more commanding, hasty and less inhibited in their verbal and bodily accounts than in The Park. I have observed that they fool around with the client, make verbal jokes and do not hesitate to make physical contact such as tapping client on the shoulder. They seem to be less reserved towards their clients, treating them rather informally, almost as fellows rather than customers. Whilst personal trainers at PureGym give their oral commands and incentives in a manner that means everyone else in the immediate environment can hear, at The Park verbal exchange between trainer and trainee is rarely audible, gestures are more controlled and take up less space. At The Park, one-to-one training appears to be more 'gentle' and more discrete, that is, less exposed and less open to the surroundings.

The general attitude I have come across at PureGym is that one should neither expect to have nor insist on having fully reliable services. What I have repeatedly heard from other members there when a class has been cancelled without prior notice were comments like "Well, it's a budget gym". The relatively low membership fee was used as an explanation, and excuse, for poor services.
It is worthwhile reporting an incident I had during my field research. On a Sunday morning at 8:30am a class had been cancelled without prior notice. In order to see how the staff reacted, I approached the assistant manager of the club and asked her why classes were being cancelled repeatedly lately. She explained at length that the class schedule had recently been readjusted, that many of the trainers had just started working at the club, and that none of the trainers except her and the club manager were actually employed on a full-time contract; they were self-employed and hence allowed to work 15 hours only a week. When I asked her

why they did not employ more people on a full-time contract, people who would be more reliable and committed, she simply said "It is a low-budget gym. We could not afford these prices if we had more full-time staff." What one ought to expect as a PureGym member seems to differ from what one can expect as a member of a more expensive gym. Comments like the one cited above have an indirect reference to class: In this particular instance, I am not interpolated by her as a gym member but also as a member of the lower class who should not expect to have access to full services.

To sum up, owning a gym membership and exercising there can be understood as a performative act for several reasons: for one, gym work-out requires a repetitive, ritualized behaviour, often with no definite endpoint. Gyms can work as aspirational spaces that engender feelings of upward mobility in terms of social standing and therefore evoke a sense of comfort. Finally, gyms often assume a certain correlation between gym membership and lifestyle that is, again, very much related to social class.

I would now like to address the question of how gym membership can be understood as part of a project of the self, or a stylization of life within the neoliberal condition. What follows is a theoretically informed discussion on what Foucault called the 'entrepreneurial self' in neoliberal societies – a concept that is helpful to establish a link between quotidian individual actions and macro-economic practices.

8.5 The 'entrepreneur of the self' at the gym

To 'be someone', that is, to possess an identity and to focus on the self as a project is, according to Giddens (1991), not within the domain of the elite anymore, as it has been in 19th and early 20th century, but it is accessible for each and every one and to be realized in the quotidian. The self, as Giddens (1991) claims,

> is seen as a reflexive project, for which the individual is responsible. We are not what we are but what we make of ourselves: what the individual becomes is dependent on the reconstructive endeavours in which he or she engages. (Giddens, 1991, p. 78)

Foucault argues similarly that the individual is expected to be an 'entrepreneur' of him or herself, "being for himself [sic] his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings" (Foucault, 2008, 226). The primacy of rational economic analysis is at the heart of all neoliberal practices and 'spills over' to other spheres of daily life.[2] Foucault is perhaps at his most 'macro-political' and 'macro-economic' when he writes that the so-called entrepreneur of the self is expected to apply micro-economic analyses to his or her love relationships, marriage, parenting, education, social relations, sexuality, leisure time etc., and as we may add, his or her relationship to the body. The entrepreneur of the self as an active, rational agent is a discursively produced or, 'invented', figure in neoliberal societies. This figure, this dominant image, is taken up by people and, accordingly, they think of and act upon themselves in the language of capital: as bundles of abilities, attributes, and qualities (Dilts, 2011). Entrepreneurial activities and 'investments' are the most important practices of the neoliberal self so that the neoliberal imperative could be formulated as follows: every action, as trivial as it may be, must produce a *useful* outcome, it must imply a return. If we follow this line of thought we may suggest that individuals allocate their time to the gym, that is to say, they rationally choose to be there because they hope to *produce a certain way of being*. We may link this insight back to the results presented in Chapter 5.

To recall, many participants believe that the gym will positively affect their daily lives and contribute to their psychological well-being. Put in neoliberal vocabularies, the gym can be said to produce positive, 'measurable' results in the quotidian, the psyche, and perhaps even in the entire persona. We are then in a

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[2] Foucault refers to neoliberalism as it was used in its original sense, that is to say, as a term for an economic philosophy that emerged among European liberal scholars in the 1930s and 1940s, and not in Harvey's (2005) sense (see Chapter1, footnote 5). This type of economy advocated a strong state, later leading to what was called social market economy. Those neoliberals believed that individual liberty was best secured by the market but that an expansion of state capacity was needed. In other words, Foucault's concept of the entrepreneurial self cannot be read as a response to the form of neoliberalism that exists since the 1980s, associated with economic liberalization, privatization, free trade, open markets, deregulation, and reductions in government spending (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009). What Foucault addresses here are political acts that are strategic, calculating, manipulating and attempting to control populations and individuals alike (such as concerns with the growth of populations, improvement of collective health, controlling space, implementing security through diplomatico-military techniques and the police etc.). And yet, the core idea of the neoliberalism of the 1930s is similar to the one of the 1980s, namely, that the logics of political economy can be taken as a model to be applied to all spheres of social life.

position to argue that it may be the discourse of the entrepreneurial self that makes people sign up to the gym. This idea is certainly foreshadowed in Bourdieu's (1986) different forms of human capital, and Shilling's idea that fitness training may be seen as an attempt to accumulate physical capital according to which time spent at the gym is then a form of capital investment: individuals conceive of themselves in a future oriented way, sacrificing time and money for a reward, a return in the future (see also Chapter 1).

However, what Foucault tries to grasp with his concept of the entrepreneurial self goes further than the idea of people trying to increase their physical and cultural capital. Or, perhaps more accurately, the discourse of the entrepreneurial self lays the epistemological grounds for a set of wider practices that treat human qualities and social relations as forms of capital in the first place. In a nutshell, Foucault diagnoses a condition in society where 'becoming' is itself understood as labour. The prompt on the enterprising self is to make a good impression, to look healthy, to show willingness to succeed and to display energy, commitment and motivation (Bührmann, 2005). This may also explain the popularity of re-inventive institutions, promising self-transformation and to become exactly such a person. In Chapter 5 I have drawn attention to various techniques at the gym that motivate users to calibrate, record and assess themselves. Part of my argument was that these practices perpetuate the belief that one can successively turn into a strong, efficient and productive person through gym training, which, as we can see here now are related to neoliberal ways of thinking the subject. In the next section I would like to engage with one particular material object at the gym that has, as I would argue, a strong discursive alignment with the ideal of the entrepreneur of the self, namely the mirror. More precisely, I would like to suggest that the repetitive engagement with one's self-image during training reinforces the idea of 'becoming' and allows gym exercisers to recognise themselves as entrepreneurs of themselves.

Mirrors, which are one of the distinguishing architectural elements in gyms, are placed in almost every area of the fitness site. It is worth noting that mirrors in other sporting facilities (e.g. dance or martial arts studios) have a corrective function; they are placed there for athletes to make sure they get their movements

right. However, mirrors at the gym, as I would like to suggest, are more than pragmatic physical objects – also having discursive functions.[3]

Given that most mirrored walls at the gym are positioned right in front of exercise machines, gym users are almost 'forced' to look at themselves and at other exercisers whilst training. The gym floor is usually an open place with "no place to hide, you are always out there" (Meredith) whereas mirrors can be said to render bodies even more visible. What the mirrors produce is presumably a heightened awareness of one's self and others and, consequently, an intensification of the gym experience. Kaptein's (2007) experimental study on gym mirrors partly supports the idea that mirrors increase people's self-awareness. Her work shows that women with greater concerns about the appearance of their bodies and higher levels of self-objectification prefer to attend fitness classes in a 'traditional' environment with mirrors over a 'non-traditional' environment without mirrored walls[4]. This suggests that mirrors go hand in hand with self-scrutinising behaviours, at least for women.

When I asked my participants about their use of the mirrors, there was a clear element of displeasure and discomfort in all accounts, with most of them saying that they would hesitate to look at themselves during training. However, there was also a clear ambivalence in people's accounts. With the exception of one participant who said that she would hate and avoid her own mirror image (Elisha), mirrors were not totally rejected. This also resonates with my observations in the field that suggest that people tend to look at themselves whilst they are training. Goffman (1963) argues that mirrors generally encourage self-absorbing behaviours:

> Mirrors are important objects to study when considering the problem of
> managing auto-involvements...apparently, the temptation to make use of nearby

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[3] In *Frame Analysis*, Goffman (1974) briefly discusses the use of mirrors in public settings and writes that artefacts may have a set of different meanings and functions, depending on the context: "Here again I argue that the meaning of an object (or an act) is a product of social definition and that this definition emerges from the object's role in the society at large…" (1974, p.39). I would also argue that in addition to the actual ways of engaging with objects and/or their role in a given society, their discursive effects also add further meanings to the objects and their use.

[4] As is common in experimental designs, 'body appearance concerns' and 'self-objectification' in Kapstein's study were measured through self-report scales. Kaptein builds her study on Harrison and Fredickon's (2003) self-objectification theory, arguing that females in western, white societies 'learn' to subject themselves to the gaze of the other from an early age, surveying their physical appearance and conforming to dominant gender images.

mirrors is very difficult to resist; here a level of self-control that ordinarily prevents unacceptable auto-involvements sometimes fails…Attention to personal appearance often entails some pleasurable self-stimulation. (Goffman, 1963, pp. 66-67)

In the context of the gym, where auto-involvements are not considered as unacceptable but, on the contrary, as desirable, one may assume that the pleasure stemming from one's own appearance is less sanctioned. In contrast to other social settings, also the pleasure that one experiences in exercising muscular strength and competence is allowed for at the gym. The look into the mirror, then, can be said to provide an opportunity for intensifying this pleasurable experience. Olivia's (age 33, secondary school teacher) account indicates this, too:

> *Ceren: Do you have any mirrors at the gym?*
>
> *Olivia: Oh yes, so many mirrors (laughing). You see, the machines there in front of the mirrors would fill up much faster than the rest of the machines. Even though they had a TV screen so you kind of had to bend over. The one that was popular was the machine, if the mirror was on the side like this (showing me), so it was on your right, so you could see your body in profile, they were the most popular machines.*
>
> *Ceren: That's interesting. Why do you think this was the case?*
>
> *Olivia: I don't know. Maybe this was a motivational technique. Either people at the gym are very pleased witht their bodies or they are not pleased with their bodies.*

By reflecting one's exercising body mirrors are visual reminders that one exercises to a certain end, that one is in-the-becoming and that exercise is therefore a liminal, intermediate activity. It might well be the case that seeing one's moving body in the mirror image causes narcissistic gratification and/or discontent[5]. In both cases, as Olivia suggests, the mirror's function would be motivational, a device to continue exercise or to work harder on the body.

> *Alexander: (…) When you're working out, a lot of it is vain thinking, a hell of it is vain thinking I'd imagine. There's always mirrors so you are always looking at*

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[5] I am aware that both Goffman and Foucault would clearly refrain from such a psychological reading of gym mirrors. However, in line with the argument made in Chapter 1, I do think that in order to unpack the psychosocial relevance of mirrors, it is useful to look at the psychic responses that people have when they are confronted with their own image in the mirror.

yourself and think "Do I look better today?", which is awful, and then I start thinking how awful it is. I do a lot of thinking about looking at versions of the self and what that means - I have thought about that quite a few times as well. Because a lot of people are becoming self-conscious and with working out in the gym they try to improve their self-image and stuff. And I've been trying to figure out, well, is it that or is it something different that's making me go to the gym.

What Alexander (age 28, sales manager) describes here is a dual process that typically occurs when one looks into the mirror. As with all self-reflections, mirrors capture two visual angles at the same time: on one level, exercisers look at themselves, their own moving and sweating bodies, and by doing so, they see themselves from an outsider angle too, that is, through the gaze of the other. Exercisers are then both the object and the subject of their own sight. Taking up this self-observant position paves the path for self-evaluation, that is, for critique and praise ("Do I look better today?"). In a way, the mirror reflects the gaze of others, may it be pejorative or laudatory. A second, related process that mirrors stimulate is the consolidation of one's embodied self through self-recognition. As Boris (age 28, post-doc fellow) points out in the following quote, there are not many instances in everyday life where one can see one's full body.

Ceren: Are there many mirrors at your gym?

Boris: Mirrors. Interesting question. You know, there is this joke about a guy who says "If there are no mirrors at the gym, I can't see myself training" (laughing). Very interesting question! They are only placed in the weights section, they are not placed in front of the machines so I can't see myself running and dying but if I lift weights, I can look at myself and think "Uuh, yes". Yes, now you are mentioning it, when I go to pick up the weights, I look at the mirror because it's a full body mirror and I rarely have the occasion to see myself. So I kind of look and look at my profile, then I go again, and I am like "Urrg, I can do this". But I don't look at myself while I am working out. I find it pathetic and I know deep down I am not that kind of person working out. You see, I didn't internalize it. I am interpreting it as something I do for myself but not as defining me, does it make sense?

The image of his body as a whole seems to increase Boris' self-awareness and renders him more ambitious ("I can do this."). At the same time, there is a part of Boris that is sceptical about what he sees in the mirror, believing "deep down" that he is not that type of person working out. Given that Boris is factually a gym member and a regular at the gym, this seems rather an unusual thing to say. If we

recall, the mirror is for Foucault a 'placeless place' for it is an actual, 'real' site but at the same time it presents an image that is essentially an optical projection and, thus, 'unreal'. In this vein, one could assert that what Boris sees in the mirror, namely himself as ambitiously preoccupied with his body, seeking to gain strength, does not correspond with the image he has of himself, his 'real' self. One may then conclude that one of the functions of gym mirrors is to subjectivize participants in a certain way, that is, to encourage them to identify themselves with an entrepreneurship type of subjectivity.

8.6 Conclusion

Ritzer (1983) writes that a society characterized by rationality is one which values efficiency, predictability, calculability and control over uncertainty and puts a great deal of emphasis on finding the best or optimum means to any given end. This resonates with the abovementioned neoliberal type of subjectivity that the gym promotes. Importantly, besides a set of habituated actions, gym members are also expected to display certain psychological attributes such as the will to succeed and the desire for self-transformation. As we have seen, many participants display a continued commitment to the fitness club, often over long periods of their lives. I have suggested in this chapter that this may be the case because gym exercise is part of an active and reiterative attempt to express and affirm one's identity. The gym can be qualified as an aspirational space in which people may feel superior in terms of their social standing as gym exercise speaks directly to the discourse of the entrepreneurial self. However, in contrast to Foucault's conceptualization of the concept that seems to imply that neoliberal logics function as blueprints for subjectivities, we have seen in the accounts above that some participants have an awareness of the gym's attempt to perpetuate this very discourse, and are resistant to taking it up. This awareness may not always be put into language by participants, but it may be expressed spontaneously on a 'pre-conscious' level, for example through feelings of discomfort. Foucault's model of normalization of society in alignment with neoliberalism postulates a rather straightforward, even a top-down, process which does not do justice to the more intricate ways in which subjectivities of gym participants are formed.

In the final chapter, I want to discuss these subject-effects in more detail, linking them back to the theoretical concepts I based my analysis upon, and to reflect on the research process.

9

Conclusion

The overall task I set myself in this thesis was to examine the subject-effects of the fitness gym. I was interested in the ways in which discourse manifests itself in the gym's interactional, socio-spatial and performative dynamics and informs the ways in which participants know, act upon and experience themselves. This final chapter re-addresses these research questions and draws together some of the key findings, also with recourse to the theoretical framework utilized in this study. In the first part of this chapter I present the four main subject-effects of the gym. In the second part, I reflect upon the research process and suggest future directions to develop and expand upon the work presented here.

9.1. The subject-effects of the gym

The four main subject-effects of the gym that I have identified are as follows:

(1) Material practices employed at gyms are tied into discourses of effectiveness and productivity through which bodies are conceptualized as open to strategic manipulation, control and power. On an affective level, this generates feelings of mastery but also feelings of failing and shame amongst gym users.

(2) Gyms promote the idea that training brings about happiness, self-satisfaction and emotional resilience. These ideas are taken up by most participants who state that they gain a greater sense of control through their gym training.

(3) Gyms afford their users with a sense of individuality and distinctiveness ('feeling special'). However, whilst there is a constant emphasis on members' uniqueness in terms of their own, distinctive body and its 'needs', there is also the impetus to compare, contrast, to look and to be like the others.

(4) Four, belonging to a gym expresses and affirms participants' sense of self in a way that harmonizes with neoliberal imperatives on the self as an enterprise. The gym invites participants to understand themselves as self-responsible, self-reliant and constantly becoming.
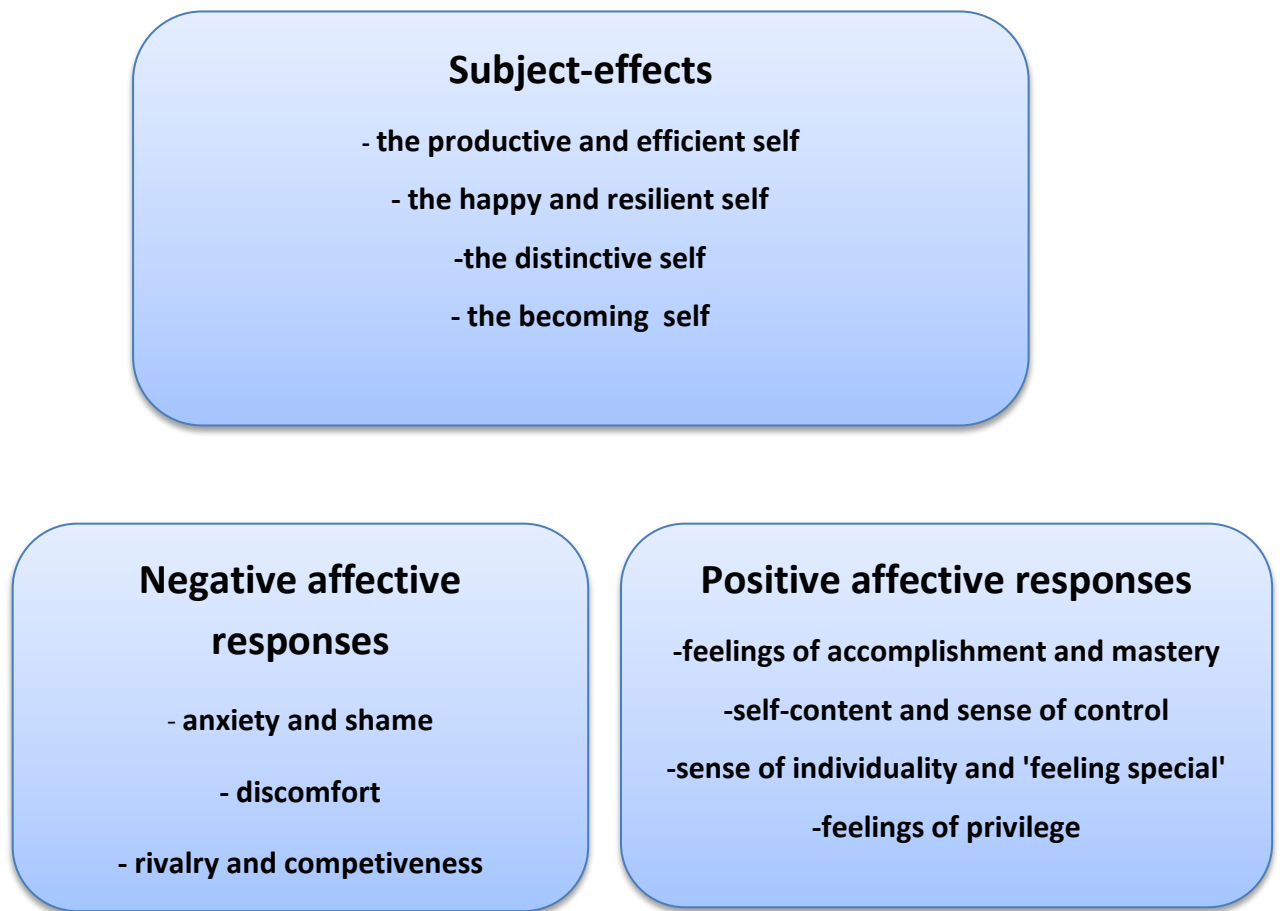
Figure 13 Summary of findings

The productive and efficient self

One of the questions that derived from my reading of Foucault's heterotopia concept and Scott's notion of the re-inventive institution was to what extent the gym can be understood as a 'reservoir for fantasies'. I asked what kinds of desires, fears and hopes concerning the self are bred in the gym and what transformations are promised? Overall, I could identify two central assumptions about the impact of fitness training amongst gym participants: First, there is a sense that their training renders them more efficient and productive and second, that it brings about psychic strength by increasing emotional resilience. In interviews, gym users report that the gym 'speeds up' their day and helps them to be more 'prepared' for challenging situations in everyday life. Personal qualities demanded by a serious fitness regime such as diligence, devotedness, and discipline are expected to be echoed in the world outside the gym. Feelings of mastery and

accomplishment are 'built' into the ways in which exercise is being done in the gym. The operationalization of bodily effort into quantifiable measurements on gym machines, for example, invites participants to set themselves sub-goals each of which they are able to assess and progressively to conquer. As outlined in Chapter 1, literature critical of contemporary fitness trends argues that gym training is employed as a strategy to enhance the body's value on the social and economic market. This idea was indeed taken up by participants who claimed that the gym would ultimately help them to accomplish more and perform better in the realm of professional life. Participants report that their gym visit affects the rest of their days in a sense that it "sets a precedent and you are like wanting things to get done" (Rosie, age 24, post-graduate student). As another participant puts it, "it [the gym] gives you more energy to do other things" (Alexander, age 28, sales manager). It is for these 'spill-over' effects that some gym members choose to train early in the morning, right before work, or, use their gym visit to structure their working day by arranging other tasks around it. The conception that gym training renders people more productive and more efficient coincides with the widespread discourse that regular gym visits reduce stress and increase psychological well-being.

The happy self: gaining psychic strength through exercise

My analysis has shown that the desire for a firm and muscular body correlates with the desire to be 'psychologically', or emotionally strong. Regular gym exercise is associated with increased psychological well-being, helping participants to tackle emotionally difficult life situations more successfully. The fitness industry, too, uses psychological or emotional vocabularies in their promotional literature. The gym is here portrayed as an investment that will make life easier; it is described as a warrant against stress and exhaustion. All participants report that the gym has positive 'effects, not only on sleep and eating patterns but also on their confidence and psychic stability. As one participant puts it, "I am more ready to combat daily stress and I'm ready for situations where I need more power and stability (Matthew, age 31, part-time PhD student and IT manager). Two participants report that they have joined the gym mainly to overcome a difficult time in their lives, one participant after her loss of close relatives and another participant after losing her job and her break up with her

partner. The gym is believed to have therapeutic and preventive effects, it "blows off steam….and is a way of escaping" (Shawn, age 35, technical assistant). One could argue that gym exercise, and here especially one-to-one exercise with a trainer, resembles other psy-disciplines (Rose, 1998). The gym promotes self-coaching practices whereby users are continually motivated, assessed, 'trained' and pushed into self-improvement routines. Gym users are implicitly expected to activate and manage their own resources, to set themselves challenges and to act upon themselves. If people find it hard to be self-motivational and self-evaluative they seek the help of a credentialed specialist and hire a personal trainer. The relationship between a trainee and a personal trainer is a coaching-like relationship. However, it can turn into a more intimate bond where the boundaries between the 'professional' and the 'private' get blurred, or, simply do not matter anymore. The training feels, then, personal in two-fold sense: first, the relationship evolving over time feels genuinely personal and authentic (with some trainers and trainees spending time together outside the gym environment) and second, the training is customized to the client so that one may feel more 'special' in contrast to other members who receive a standardized training only.

The distinctive self: feeling special and yet 'normal'

At the gym, there is a sense of perfect accommodation to individuality - a sense that the fitness club's amenities and services are sensitive to individual needs and desires. The induction is a good example here. During this first encounter between trainer and trainee, the trainer spends a fairly long amount of time inquiring about the member's expectations and personal targets. The many questions about one's medical history, the various bodily measurements and, ultimately, the exercise programme that one receives at the end of the induction foster the sense that there is a type of training that is 'just for me'. As my data has shown, though, normalizing, or homogenising, practices are equally prevalent at the gym. Various 'normalities' regarding bodily functions and bodily qualities are given, such norm tables that function as base lines, as points of reference from which comparisons are encouraged and interventions called upon. By providing numbers, calculations and calibrations the gym encourages participants to count and to compare themselves with some set standards. By the same token, the many mirrors on the gym floors and exercise rooms invite gym members to judge other people's

bodies as well as their own physicality in comparison to them. To give another example, the material objects in female changing rooms such as make-up remover pads, or playpens for children assume certain ways of being a 'normal' woman whilst excluding others. This may engender feelings of discomfort, of not being quite right, of being excluded but it also ignites a desire to fit in, to look and to perform better. This tension between normalization and individualization becomes most evident when we look at conventional gym training versus personal training: Whilst choreographed and synchronized class exercise yields a certain 'we-feeling' and promotes the idea of 'sameness', personal training marks exclusivity and assumes uniqueness. Personal training is promoted as suited to the participant's abilities, personality, goals, and problems and may thus be qualified as an individualizing tactic. By the same token, machines that leave almost no space for improvisation are yet recommended by personal trainers. This tension, or, to and fro movement between individualization and normalization is one core feature of the gym.

The self as an enterprise

The gym can be said to be different from other places that could be called a heterotopia or a re-inventive institution: in contrast to beauty farms, boot camps and other places where physical, mental, cognitive transformation is being promised within a given time frame, the gym must be frequented as a matter of routine in order to sustain the hope of becoming a different person. Put more forcefully, the paradox of the gym experience is that it ignites the desire to create a better and happier version of the self but, at the same time, deems this attempt as virtually infinite. This is best expressed in Boris' nonchalantly expressed words: "Now that I'm into it, I will, I think, forever be doing something like this. But forever is a long time". The treadmill might be said to be a paradigm of the contemporary ethos of a self-managed life and the idea of endless, progressive enhancement and accumulation of so-called 'human capital'. It is then not so much the self-policing that Foucault identifies when he studies how institutions work, but the self-coaching of subjectivities through which fitness sites primarily operate. My analysis has also shown that the gym's working principles rely on a quantified conceptualization of 'health' and 'fitness' (see the notions of 'health scores' and 'fitness levels') which frames health as something that can be

increased and actively acquired. Health is defined as an entity, as a feature of the gym user, something that can be operationalized, controlled and manipulated. This discourse makes the imperative to care for and be responsible for one's self possible in the first place. Responsibility is to be taken for both bodily failures and its successes. It is as if every bodily dysfunction could be 'exercised away', or at least handled strategically. This is, as many authors have stated (e.g. Crawford, 1980, 2006; Lupton, 2003), in line with the neoliberal, post-welfare conceptualizations of health that seek to increase the number of active and self-reliant citizens in order to decrease the number of those who are financially dependent on the state. As Lupton (2013) argues, the 'quantified self' might be said to be an expression of neoliberal entrepreneurialism, celebrating self-maximisation and promoting self-critique through the presentation of 'objective' measures of performance. To produce data about one's self, to 'know' one's self better and eventually to improve seems to be one of the core tenets of contemporary society. The functioning of the treadmill serves as an illustration. The fact that one moves forward without actually moving anywhere better or different can be read as a metaphor of neoliberal subjectivity: people seek to improve themselves, to maintain discipline, and to enhance their qualities and performances in order to cope with life, to combat existing stress, to alleviate vulnerability whereby they are continually motivated, assessed, 'trained' and pushed into self-improvement routines and schedules.

9.2 Creating better versions of the self

One could argue that the gym represents what is becoming increasingly an ethos and way of life in the fields of career, relationships, family life, and most notable, to the ways in which people relate to their selves and their own bodies. What makes the gym a neoliberal symptom, one could ask, as opposed to a late modern phenomenon in a Giddensian (1991) sense – where the production of the reflexive self, self-monitoring self, is carried out without any recourse to neoliberalism? What is distinctive for neoliberal thinking is the imperative to be fit for the market, to increase human capital, to treat one's self and one's life as a project or as an enterprise and to compete with and challenge one's own capacities. It is also about easing pain with "new social technologies for preventing or alleviating

potential or actual vulnerabilities and for encouraging resilience and adaptation" proliferating (McFalls & Pandolfi, 2014, p. 180). The discourses on health are certainly related to the corporate managerial discourse that has infiltrated governmental understandings and handlings of health with ideals of rationalization and efficiency, customer satisfaction, producer/consumer relations and performance targets (Brett, 2003). Given that health is increasingly treated as a private responsibility and as something that one can purchase one may think of the gym as an element of the commercialization of health services.

9.3 Contribution to knowledge

This study makes a two-fold contribution to knowledge. First, it advances our understanding of the gym as a contemporary social phenomenon by exploring the subject-effects that the gym produces. The main conclusion of this study is that the gym is a technology of subjectivity, and not only a technology of the body as one would have expected. Certainly, people come to the gym to work upon their bodies, to alter and increase their physical fitness, but, as my analysis has shown, exercise is only one side of the coin. For some, body work is even secondary; it is almost a 'side-effect' of the gym. What gym participants hope to achieve is a better, fitter and stronger version of themselves, that enables them to "keep on going", to master their everyday lives, to cope psychologically with their stresses and strains. Part of the gym's success is its resonance with neoliberal discourses on the body and the self as an enterprise, something that must be cultivated, taken care of, worked upon and, ultimately, optimized.

Second, this study contributes both to the new emerging area of Psychosocial Studies and to the field of Discourse Studies. To understand how materially and spatially situated, relational and affective practices in gyms can function as discursive resources and, as such, inform participants' subjectivities I drew on an eclectic use of theoretical concepts and terminologies in this study. I have shown how a Foucault-inspired analytics of space can be enriched by a psychosocially informed framework and can widen the analytic scope of conventional discourse analyses. As noted previously, most forms of critical discourse analysis focus on language to extrapolate the historic and societal conditions of possibility that led to a particular set of discourses. In contrast, I suggested that a psychosocially

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informed analysis of the gym's subject-effects would ask how subjects' sense of self, their embodied experiences and affects are informed by the discourses that are perpetuated in and through a given social and spatial environment. By doing this, I have shown how people subjectivize discourses, how they take them on, how they get 'attached' to them, and ultimately, how they guide their conduct, their thinking, and interactions according to them.

9.4 Suggestions for further research

There are at least two routes that could be followed from here on: one is empirical, and the other theoretical. In the case of a more in-depth analysis of the gym it might be interesting to study trainers' views more systematically. This study has focussed mainly on gym participants and where trainers have been considered it has been in order to better grasp gym goers' subjectivities. An accentuation of their perspectives might give us an insight into the impact of emotional and immaterial labour, but also how attachment and emotional reciprocity are negotiated in the context of the commercial gym. By a similar token, it would be interesting to look at femininities and masculinities in more explicit ways, perhaps also including women-only gyms in the analysis. For women, the type of person that is promoted in gyms is affirmative of the heteronormative, sexualised, white female. It would be interesting to deepen this kind of analysis, and to look for tensions and contradictions – also for male and non-white participants. Due to the scope of this study, the critical voices that some interviewees have raised (for example Jennifer, Liz and Susan in Chapter 7 and Meredith and Kate in Chapter 8) could be explored only briefly. In future studies, it might be worth looking at how gym participants resist taking on the subject-effects that the gym produces in more detail. This could be accomplished with a return to the present data set, but also with further empirical material.

Theoretically, I started off this study from a discursive perspective and engaged with a series of concepts on space and spatial practices. Although the concepts I used were mainly inspired by Foucault's works, I adopted a 'tool-box' approach, meaning that I 'supplemented' discourse theory with a set of other approaches. The more I engaged with the data, though, the more grew my sensibility towards the complex affective involvement of my participants in the field. Whilst

Foucault, Goffman, Scott and Bourdieu were useful to understand how socio-spatial practices inform the ways in which people understand themselves, and how space itself can work as a discursive technology, these theories did not provide me with substantial analytic vocabularies to unpack people's affective involvement and their different ways of relating to one another. What emerged and remained a challenge throughout the thesis can perhaps be described as a general tension between deductive and explorative approaches. This tension always persists when one engages with a set of theories first, and then proceeds to data collection and analysis. I encountered this tension by trying to 'distance' myself from the theories I grappled with during data collection and data analysis. I was not strictly bound to my topic guide and I took also into account those accounts and experiences that were not explicitly addressed by the concepts I had dealt with previously. As I have stressed above, this posed a challenge, mainly when I tried to make sense of gym participants' (and my own) affective responses.

In this vein, to study the positive and negative affective responses the gym generates in more depth, and to understand *why* people subjectivize certain discourses rather than others, it might be useful to turn to psychoanalytic concepts in future studies. What I have in mind here is the concept of (nonpathological) narcissism (Freud [1914] cited in Sandler & Fonagy, 2012; Kernberg, 2014; Lash 1979). According to Freudian theory, unconscious fantasies about being omnipotent and not vulnerable stem from an early developmental stage but are still inherent to adult psychic life (Winnicott, 2014 [1971]). As LaPlanche (1999) emphasizes, the other's recognition remains always crucial for subjects, and most notably, for their development of self-worth and self-confidence. If one of the gym users' motives and hopes is to create better, stronger and more resilient versions of the self, as I argue in this study, one may assume that there is a perceived lack thereof. The gym might then work as a place in which people work upon themselves to generate others' recognition through self-enhancement, which would be, as Kernberg (2014) writes, one common psychic strategy to regulate self-worth. The idea in the theory of narcissism that individuals have a desire to feel unique and special may be applied to the gym context, too: the individualizing techniques that are prevalent at the gym may be said to draw on and to intensify narcissistic fantasies of being special and omnipotent. This would

partly explain why the discourse on self-optimization takes such a hold in gym users' subjectivities, why people get attached to it. In line with these thoughts, one may ask whether the ways in which social life is organized in western, neoliberal societies offers enough ways for a 'genuine' satisfaction of narcissistic needs, and whether places such as the gym offer only temporary and cursory satisfaction. Such a psychoanalytically informed study of fitness gyms would assist us to grapple with the unconscious dynamics at work. When done critically, psychoanalysis would even help "to unsettle social situations by revealing the unconscious elements that feed into them" (Frosh 2012 in Roseneil & Frosh, 2012, p.58-59). It would certainly shed more light on those experiences that cannot be narrated and be put into language.

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Appendix A) List of interviewees

	name	gen-der	age	profession	gym membership	date of the interview
1	Sarah	f	32	research assistant	London School of Economics, university gym	22.02.11
2	Eric	m	42	marketing agent	LA Fitness	11.03.12
3	Matthew	m	31	part-time PhD student and IT manager	Imperial College, university gym	14.11.12
4	Peter	m	57	project manager	Fitness First	01.03.11
5	Aisha	f	40	not in paid employment	Ballantine's Gym	05.02.12
6	Boris	m	28	post-doc fellow	Ballantine's Gym	13.03.11
7	Rosie	f	24	post-graduate student	Virgin Active	16.05.12
8	Samantha	f	28	administrative staff	University of London, university gym	10.03.11
9	Meredith	f	32	client executive	Jubilee Hall Club	23.05.11
10	Alexander	m	28	sales manager	Fitness First	13.06.12
11	Diane	f	64	freelance translator	London School of Economics, university gym	12.03.11
12	Olivia	f	33	secondary school teacher	Fitness First	15.03.11
13	Shawn	m	35	technical assistant	The Third Space	09.05.13
14	Jessica	F	43	art historian	Virgin Active	04.04.12

Appendix A) List of interviewees

15	Agnes	F	48	university lecturer	LA Fitness	28.04.12
16	Elisha	F	31	primary school teacher	LA Fitness	23.11.12
17	Joanna	F	30	administrator in a law firm	LA Fitness	16.04.12
18	Jennifer	F	42	researcher	Thity-seven Degrees	27.08.12
19	Liz	f	34	accountant	Nuffield Health Centre	05.03.11
20	Janet	f	39	language teacher	The Place	02.03.11
21	Hannah	f	35	researcher	London Virgin Active	28.02.11
22	Zara	f	52	psychotherapist	Virgin Active	25.02.11
23	Amy	f	29	personal trainer	YMCA	29.11.13
24	Cassy	F	32	personal trainer	Matt Roberts	15.09.13
25	Kate	f	40	administrator in a human resources department	Virgin Active	23.02.11
26	Roxanne	f	36	art curator	LA Fitness	18.08.12
27	Susan	f	69	emeritus professor	Virgin Active	21.07.11
28	Jesse	m	24	post-graduate student	Ballantine's	26.03.12
29	Eddie	m	36	lawyer and former personal trainer	Ballantine's	14.01.11
30	Yannick	f	48	not in paid employment	GymBox	20.10.12
31	Aaron	m	34	security staff	PureGym	25.09.12
32	Hakim	m	32	personal trainer	Virgin Active	08.03.11

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Wednesday, November 14, 2012

Dear ……………………………,

I would like to invite you to take part in my doctoral research project:

<div align="center">

The 'subject-effects' of gyms:

studying the interactional, socio-spatial and performative order of the fitness site

</div>

The interview will take approximately 30-60 minutes and will be audio recorded. Personal information will be treated as strictly confidential and will not be made publicly available or given to any other person. Participant anonymity is ensured in the project. Information generated by the study may be published, but no details will be divulged from which the participant could be identified.

Involvement in the project is voluntary and participants are free to withdraw consent at any time, and to withdraw any data previously supplied.

If you would like to participate in this project please sign this form as indication of your consent. If you have any questions both before and after signing about the research project than please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you.

Best wishes,

Ceren Yalçın
PhD candidate
Department for Psychosocial Studies
Birkbeck College
University of London

Email: cerenyln@gmx.de
Phone: 0744 2551637

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date, signature