

“Fit for consumption” – about the social production of the individual

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Let us, for a moment, consider Descartes’s well-known dualism, that sees man as consisting of two separate substances, the body and the mind. On the whole, present-day philosophers have rejected the Cartesian thesis of a division between mind and body, but the thought substantially influenced Western philosophy and religion for two and a half centuries, and the problem – left unsolved by Descartes – of finding an empirically identifiable meeting point between the two parts of the dichotomy, known as the mind–body problem, has occupied thinkers since the mid-seventeenth century. In Cartesian dualism, the body was considered of limited value, trivial, almost illusory, whereas the mind (or soul) was highly valued, enduring and efficacious – *cogito ergo sum*, I think, therefore I am.

At the start of the twentieth century, a new awareness of the corporeal realm developed among philosophers and other thinkers, including political philosophers, ideologists and activists. And 325 years after Descartes’s death 1650, the pendulum had swung the other way, when, in the 1970s, we experienced the emergence of institutions and commercial establishments exclusively devoted to the development of the physical body. *Agito ergo sum*. I move, therefore I am.

Not until 2007 did the first sociological study of the fitness phenomenon appear; incidentally, the same year saw the publication of a major study on exercise dependency. The Canadian, Leicestershire-based cultural sociologist Jennifer Smith Maguire’s wittily entitled *Fit for Consumption*, subtitled *Sociology and the Business of Fitness*, is developed from her dissertation from City University of New York, and is an investigation into the flourishing New York fitness industry. We asked another cultural sociologist, and body theorist to boot, Henning Eichberg for a review of Maguire’s book; what we got was a review essay, where our reviewer presents Maguire’s study and problematizes her relationship to theory as well as her conclusions – particularly when she puts the fitness-seeking individual in the center. Eichberg thoroughly penetrates the problem of the role of the fitness individual in the fitness industry.

Fitness exercise in health clubs appears in the world of modern sociology often as icon for the 'individualization', which is said to dominate the contemporary society. The individual exerciser represents literally the self-building personality, producing actively his or her bodily self and identity and facing his or her own shape in the mirrors of the club.

When I look in the mirror, I see somebody who's finding herself, who has said once and for all it doesn't really matter what role society said I should play. I can do anything I want and feel proud about doing it.¹

This quote from a bodybuilder is declared to be typical for the 'age of individualization'. But what is real, and what is fancy construction in this imagination? This is what we can ask on the basis of Maguire's study about health clubs in New York – and at other places in the world.

Some characteristic lines of contradiction have crossed the field of sociology, concerning the tricky question of individualization. From the 1950s onward, one would with David Riesman talk about the outer-directed personality in the "lonely crowd", and later, with Christopher Lasch, about the culture of narcissism. This had undertones of conservative cultural criticism.

Since the 1980s, this discourse has been replaced and re-interpreted by the 'post-modern' or 'late-modern' discourse of individualization and quest for self-identity. Cultural criticism turned to optimistic narratives in the style of Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, in body sociology applied by Mike Featherstone, Chris Shilling and others.

The more or less affirmative story of the self-producing individual was, however, challenged by some more critical philosophy. Michael Foucault's reconstructed in a skeptical way how power and its panoptical view produced the individual. And Pierre Bourdieu described the social habitus as creator and mediator of individual patterns of taste and behavior. Instead of falling into the trap of conservative cultural criticism, this opened for a critical perspective of 'the individual' as a social construction.

History of industrial fitness and fitness industry

Referring to this framework of sociological approaches, Jennifer Smith Maguire, lecturer in mass communications at the University of Leicester, UK, has approached the field of fitness, with special focus on the United States. This has resulted in a well-written, clearly structured and empirically rich study, which may very well come to be regarded as the standard work in its field. Anyhow, it is the first comprehensive socio-cultural and historical analysis of modern fitness culture, as the back cover correctly asserts.

The empirical material is presented in four parts: historical roots, the health club, fitness media, and the personal trainer.

The historical part reconstructs the long lines of fitness in the modern societal mind-scape. It all started in the early nineteenth century, when the older Puritan suspicion of ath-

1 Chris Shilling 1993: *The Body and Social Theory*. London: Sage, 7, referring to Anthony Giddens.

letics as idle distraction from one's worldly and moral duties was replaced by a neo-Puritan instrumental relation to exercise as being good for both one's individual development and the perfection of the human race more generally. This social reform took the forms of Muscular Christianity, which influenced the YMCA, and of sporting nationalism, as it was represented by Theodore Roosevelt. The public health strategies of this exercise culture were directed against 'degeneration' and neurasthenia. It was strongly influenced by alarming reports about the decrease of young men's military fitness, an anxiety which was revitalized during the World Wars I and II and later again during the Cold War.

Meanwhile, however, the mainstream had since the 1920s changed towards a new culture of personality, which played on individual uncertainties of how one was looking and how to become a self-made man. Charles Atlas and Jack La Lanne built their enterprises around this image-work. At the end of the 1960s, the YMCA, formerly an organization of youth care and spiritual awakening transformed itself into a chain of fitness sites.

The transition went, thus, from building a better society by fitness and health, to better adapting to society. The body became physical capital for the new professional and managerial classes. On the level of health, this happened parallel to an epochal change of disease profile. Where so far infective diseases like influenza, pneumonia and tuberculosis had been the main causes of death, now heart diseases and cancer became central, the so-called lifestyle diseases (p. 42, 199). They created a new scenario of anxiety, for a time called 'manager disease', and were followed up by the current moral panic of obesity. Public policies played together with the market sector in making the individual responsible, and schooling the individual's risk management.

However, health is one thing, appearance is another. A new world of service work appeared in post-Fordist economy. In the transition from producing goods to creating interactions and images, a promotional culture unfolded, which made large sectors of the labor force dependent of their bodily appearance. This change had a gender dimension, as women's labor market participation was increasing, and the dual-income family arose to become the mainstream model. Gender roles were remodeled and the attention to looks and logos became obsessive. Beauty became a form of capital. The American dream moved from the meritocracy of hard work to the work of winning imager. Appearance sold – but not on any social level. The labor market became deeply split between low-income groups and high-income groups with different body-political strategies.

Whether the periods of the US-American process can be generalized, requires some more comparative historical studies. The three-step periodization from Puritan opposition over social reform to muscular individualization may have a particular American bias. In Germany for instance,² and to some degree also in Denmark,³ a relevant break can be registered in the years after 1900, when new tendencies of 'natural health', fitness and body-building unfolded in the context of nudism, yoga, rhythmic gymnastics, and expressive

2 Bernd Wedemeyer-Kolwe 2004: „Der neue Mensch“. *Körperkultur im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann. – Chad Ross 2005: *Naked Germany. Health, Race and the Nation*. Oxford/New York: Berg. – Marion E. P. de Ras 2008: *Body, Femininity and Nationalism. Girls in the German Youth Movement 1900-1934*. New York, London: Routledge.

3 Henning Eichberg & Ejgil Jespersen 1986: *De grønne bølger. Træk af natur- og friluftslivets historie*. Gerlev: Bayne-banke. New ed. Vejle: DGI 2001. – Kasper Lund Kirkegaard 2007: *Fra muskelmasse til massebevægelse. Indblik i den kommercielle fitness-sektors historie*. Copenhagen: Idrættens Analyseinstitut. – For further international comparison see Volkwein, Karin A. E. 1998 (ed.): *Fitness as Cultural Phenomenon*. (= German & American Studies in Sport. 4) Münster & New York: Waxmann.

dance. Furthermore, there was a relation to the roaming movement of the *Wandervögel*, to outdoor activities like scouting, and to outdoor recreation (*natur- og friluftsliv*). This reform culture, being connected with a self-organized youth movement and a new girl's culture, with workers' culture and spiritual movements had a more oppositional, counter-cultural and less commercial character than in the US. It may be open for future discussion whether this was another exceptionalism of America, on line with what Werner Sombart in 1906 asked: Why is there no socialism in the United States?

The health club – innovation and typology

After all these historical 'warming up', a new world of health-and-appearance fitness in America coincides with the rise of the health club phenomenon since the 1970s. Historically, it was based on four types of forerunners.

The *executive club* was – like the nineteenth century's elite athletic club – foremost a club, i.e. a place of relaxation for the middle-aged businessman. The tension and stress and the increasing threat of a heart attack for this particular socio-professional group made large corporations launch fitness programs, and the fitness facilities of the clubs grew.

The *gym* had, in contrast, its origin among working-class men. The milieu of boxers, weight lifters and bodybuilders however, gained middle-class respectability during the 1970s. And gyms began to attract women, too.

Exercise salons were so far predominantly feminine sites. Often run by former dancers and gymnasts, the salons were directed towards the middle and upper classes. However, they gradually opened up towards businesswomen, housewives, and secretaries.

The *YMCA*, finally, was the longest-standing provider of exercise places in the US. From its original religious and urban mission, it transformed during the 1970s into an enterprise of fitness clubs, offering services especially to a lower-status public.

From these roots, the *lifestyle-fitness club* of the 1970 emerged as a new model. Today these clubs are stratified between high-cost luxury establishments and lower-cost clubs, and in addition differentiated between various 'club personalities'. A differentiation of economic and psychological character is between the sale-driven and the retention-driven club. The sale-driven club is focusing on signing up members, and is regarded as rather a 'poor' model, while the retention-driven club emphasizes service and tends to be higher ranking. Maguire illustrates these types by user interviews and user fitness biographies as well as by single clubs' profiles. The cases give a living picture of the world of clubs, which in statistics can be read as being 57% female, predominantly middle-class and in terms of age profile more and more diverse.

Fitness media – dream production and ideal readers

In a similar combination of statistical material and qualitative narratives, Maguire describes the media market. Since the 1970s, magazines like *Men's Health*, *Shape* and *Self* and various fitness manuals have made up a market segment of its own. The readers are 63% women and 34% members of the professional or managerial classes.

The fitness media are a main instrument to promote an individualized user-image: do it yourself – chose yourself – be yourself by consuming. Maguire tends at times to take this image for granted as the 'self-identity project of modernity'. In this part of the study, consequently, the intentional texts of the media producers and writers dominate, while reader

interviews – comparable to the users' voices in the club chapter – are absent. The question can, however, be raised, of how the reader relates the mythology of the fitness-body to his or her own practice. The problem is known from different genres of literature. The medieval hagiographies of saints with their admonitions to live a pious life were not at all read by monks only – and did they really make people pious? Fantasy novels are not only read by people simulating the knights and sorcerers in their own practice, though role games are a side line of readers' practice. Why do people buy and read the fitness magazines and manuals, how do they read them (*if* they read them), and how is the reading connected with their fitness activity – or non-activity? This chapter has to be written later on.

Indeed, Maguire is not at all uncritical towards the mythology of the fitness media. She asks, with Bourdieu, for the logic behind the individual choices and preferences, as they are conjured up in the media. But this question must remain without answer as long as only the ideal reader is reconstructed, and the real reader remains hidden. The 'real reader', who turns up in the magazines' section called 'reader's letters', and to whom Maguire refers, is no ersatz for this social figure. The 'reader' of the letters' section may be as selected or even simulated and stage-managed as the 'real exercisers' of the success-stories, which the magazines present in order to give themselves a certain realistic touch. On the front-page of the fitness magazines, the real reader has no place – the view of obese normality would hamper the sale.

Fitness media are dream productions and they express an educational-motivational intention, this is what Maguire explicates in detail. There is no reason to take the practical realization of manuals in the hand of the real reader for granted. Isn't it possible that the fitness magazines function as a sort of soft-core pornography, which appeals more to the senses of the real reader – and to people's wishes, dreams and feelings of insufficiency – than to his or her practice?

The personal trainer – relational body work

Side by side with the health club market and the fitness media market, but a few decades later, a new labor market has developed around the social figure of the personal trainer. Again, Maguire delivers useful data as well as good qualitative stuff from educational texts and trainer interviews. The personal trainers appear as a new type of producers who do not only advise the client on the basis of their professional biomechanical and physiological knowledge, but – on one hand – show off their own bodies as ideal and – on the other hand – work on the motivation of the practitioner to continue his or her membership and 'torture' in the club: Do it yourself, do it again, and do it again and again!

The personal trainer has a special importance for the club, as the club as such is rather limited in its power to hold on to its customers/practitioners. In the 1990s, half of the club members is said to have quit within six or sometimes even two months (p. 124).

Thus the personal trainer not only services the client, he or she is also of crucial importance for retaining the consumers. By sensible and nuanced description, Maguire shows how the personal trainer's bodily capital (the impressive bodily shape), intellectual capital (education and science of training) and social capital (networking) play together. Especially the latter, the trainer's relational capabilities, contribute to unfold the new social figure of a cultural intermediary. The formula of the personal trainer is: Bodily beauty as capital plus emotional labor.

Individual solutions for social problems – and a methodological dilemma

In a concluding chapter, Maguire does not only sum up, but sharpens her findings politically. One of the sharp points concerns the paradox that in society as a whole, sport, exercise and leisure activities have expanded alongside the increase of inactivity and obesity. US obesity rates increased by two-thirds between 1960 and 1990, and increased another two-thirds over the 1990's. At the same time as the number of commercial health clubs more than doubled and the number of fitness magazines tripled, consumption of fast food tripled and the consumption of soft drinks increased by 131 per cent (pp. 200-201).

This is the fat-fit paradox, which has to be fundamental for sociological analysis of this field. To some relevant parts, the paradox has its background in a deep split of class habitus between middle-class and lower strata.

From this observation, Maguire concludes that fitness is not just "good for us" – because: Who is 'us'? Fitness is a useful practice only for certain habitus groups. Its fundamental problem is that it is "addressing a social, structural problem with an individualized solution".

On four levels, Maguire finally launches a critique of fitness as a solution for people's health problems such as inactivity and obesity.

(1) Fitness treats socially produced problems like fatness, inactivity, boredom, and poor time management as *personal failings*.

(2) It lacks attention to *environment* as an essential factor of health. The "obesogenic" landscape needs a shift in urban land use. (For Denmark, this could be supplemented by the significance of the bicycle movement, neglected and turned down by Danish bourgeois politics, but promoted and politically developed in the municipalities of Odense and Copenhagen.)⁴

(3) The commercial structure of the fitness *market*, addressing middle-class and adults, excludes certain social strata and hides the fact that obesity stems in part from the decline of Physical Education in *childhood*.

(4) The fitness field reproduces the *tension between indulgence and restraint*, between the car and the treadmill. What is encouraged is not healthy, but consuming behavior. And it lacks the element of play. Play is replaced by a rationalization of movement, and this requires permanent motivational work – which finally fails rather than succeeds. "For bodies that are fit for consumption, leisure is work, health is appearance, and pleasure lies in discipline"; this is how Maguire finishes her analysis (p. 208).

The political conclusion is logically derived from rich empirical evidence, and, thus, convincing. So far, so good. However, the conclusion surprises when compared with some of the theoretical premises of the study. On the theory level, the study joins here and there the Giddens-Beck-Featherstone discourse about "the age of individualization" as a matter of fact and as "modernity's legacy" (pp. 18-19, 112-13). In other words, it blurs the fundamental discrepancies and incompatibilities between the Giddens-Beck approach and the Foucault-Giddens critique of the naïve notion of the 'individual'. Both sides are – in theory

4 Jens Troelsen 2004: Mobil på cykel – en refleksiv analyse af kvaliteter og barrierer for cykling som transportform. Odense: Syddansk Universitet, dissertation.

– presented as prescribed authorities, though in their logical consequence they exclude each other.

This shows a weak approach to the use of theory. Theory is not just a way of labeling empirical phenomena by certain authoritative key-words, but a way of taking contradictions seriously. There's the contradiction between 'choosing self', 'self-identity', 'do-it-yourself self', and 'performing self' on the one hand and 'habitus' and the production of subjectivity by 'panoptical power' on the other.

The dilemma becomes especially apparent where the study tries to sum up the connection between fitness sites, fitness media, fitness goods, and fitness services in a graphic picture. How to build all these social-commercial phenomena of market offers and colonization into one comprehensive visual order? Here Maguire introduces a fifth phenomenon and puts it into the centre of the picture: "the fitness consumer" (p. 9). The 'individual' is suddenly – and without further discussion – exalted to be the centre of the (fitness) world. In relation to the individual consumer, the sites, media, goods and services are just the surrounding.

The rather witty title of the book, "fit for consumption", is by this theoretical trick turned into a quite different direction: Fit for the consumer. Where "Fit for consumption" describes the subordination of the fitness practitioner under the market, the graphic picture heightens the practitioner – in accordance with the actor-perspective of Giddens – to the sovereign centre of the field.

In other words, a theoretical picture is postulated, which is, with good arguments, contradicted by the empirical work of the study. The 'individual' is, thus, not only a commercial and societal product, as Maguire criticizes it. The 'individual' is also a methodological postulate which Maguire applies herself. 'Individuality' in this understanding is an assumption, which, with Peter Sloterdijk, may be called 'epistemological solipsism'.⁵ The human being is epistemologically treated as if it was alone in the world, and only secondarily related to the societal world of sites, media, goods, and services.

This dilemma requires closer examination and critique.

Where is the 'individual' of the fitness world?

To get some order into this contradictory argumentation, it can be helpful to list some empirical arguments of 'individualization' and to confront them more systematically with contradicting evidence. Where is the 'individual' in the fitness world, as presented in the rich material of Maguire? In a first step, the configuration, which is 'individualizing' the fitness practitioner, shall be taken seriously.

On the 'individual' side appears the *single consumer* of fitness, be it the individual visitor of a health club or the single reader of a fitness magazine. This is a person who has a certain status of *health* and a certain *shape*, and indeed, both dimensions can be related to individual qualities of life and appearance. 'My health' is mine, and not the others' – and 'my shape' is mine, too. What is trained in the world of fitness is the single muscle or a set of muscles, i.e. what is inside the skin-bag of the human being.

5 Peter Sloterdijk 1998: *Sphären. Plurale Sphärologie*. Vol.1. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp.

Whether one is participating in fitness activity, continuing or discontinuing the body work, joining a certain club or changing to another, working at a certain machine or joining a certain exercise class, all this is a question of *choice*. The individual is permanently challenged to choose, as when buying n athletic shoes.

What is special in the choice of fitness is that the practitioner does not enter into collective games as in sport, but in *individual exercises*. These exercises are trained by single consumers alone, or side by side in the loneliness of unrelated activity.

The place of the practitioner is at the *machine*. Maguire delivers some interesting remarks about the spreading of Nautilus and other machines since the 1970s, which could be detailed into a history of fitness technology. The treadmill determines the individual space. The *screen* as a medium of self-monitoring reinforces this; what is on the screen are 'my own' data, not the others'. And the *earphone* contributes, adding auditive isolation to the exercise situation.

The time of the fitness practitioner is the *personal schedule*. The practitioner enters the club after individual decision, whether planned or spontaneously. The consumer does not depend on a team, a peer group, a formal or informal group schedule.

The overarching time pattern of the fitness practitioner is the fitness biography, which is normally imagined as an individual success story, as individual *progress*. The popular magazine reports on people's shape 'before and after' deliver a visual story for this progression.

The practitioner continues in the club depending of his or her *motivation*. This driving force is normally described in terms of personal energy, depending of the exerciser's individual character.

What is coming out of the exercise process are *data*, which are related to the practitioner's individual name, shown on the screen, and reflected as part of the individual's fitness biography.

The practitioner is to some degree subjected to the control of the personal trainer, but as a chosen service, also the trainer's control is an individual choice. To a high degree, however, the fitness relation is – or is imagined to be – a relation to one-self, i.e. *self-control*. Self-discipline is promoted as keeping an exercise log or diary and charting one's own progress. Benjamin Franklin as a Puritan forerunner of the 'self-made man' was known for his self-controlling accounting and book-keeping.

The superstructure of these individualizing practices is made up by the abstract *idea of the 'Self'*, the self of ideology. The manual individualizes by appealing to the single human being: You should do this... – and you should do it for yourself! *Self* is the name of a large US fitness magazine, launched in 1979 and billing itself as the first women's fitness magazine. *Self* is nowadays the third largest fitness magazine on the market, as measured in paid circulation (pp. 108-9). Other magazine titles like *Men's Health* (the largest on the market) and *Shape* (the second largest) play on the key-words, which were named above as central for an individualizing understanding: individual health and shape. The rhetoric of the fitness magazines and manuals is more generally built up around notions of improved self-image, personal power, self-worth, and self-actualization (p. 131). Some sociologists have taken this ideology for granted and supplied the logo-words of the market with their own creations as: self-identity and individualization (Giddens), performing self, individuality, self-expression and stylistic self-consciousness (Featherstone), do-it-yourself self (Beck), and choosing self (Slater).

The roots of this enlarged self can be found in the ideology of the *self-made man*, who from the 1920s on was propagated as a model figure rising from dishwasher to millionaire. It had its bodily correlate in the Muscular Individualism of Charles Atlas and others, which as a dominant ideological creation had taken over after the nineteenth century's zeitgeist of Muscular Christianity and sporting nationalism.

A common feature of the recent prolific word-production around the 'self' and its manifestation in fitness activity is that they literarily express the self-production of the human being. This is usually regarded as indicating a fundamentally modern, post-modern, late-modern, high-modern or reflexive modern identity – the notions are shifting, often illustrating an imprecise and nebulous periodization. And this identity is said to have resulted from industrialization, urbanization, migration, and globalization. The all-embracing rhetoric shows that the ideology of individualization has elements of religion or religion-ersatz. It delivers a picture of 'the whole world' and its inherent dynamics: Where the human being comes from, where it goes, what it should believe, what it should do etc.

Social patterns of 'individual' fitness – the relational human being

All this seems in one way or other to affirm the hypothesis of the 'age of individualization'. When testing the ideology of the Self on a deeper empirical and theoretical level, however, the picture becomes less convincing. 'Individualization' reveals social meanings and social relations, and it is just the world of fitness that delivers typically few pictures of this relational dimension.

We start by the basic elements of bodily movement: by social space and social time, emotions and atmosphere, relations and reification of fitness activities.⁶

Social space and social time

Fitness activity is dependent of certain spaces. The site of fitness is the *club*. The club is, as Maguire has shown in detailed history, a new place of social character, which represents and favors a new type of sociality. The club expresses its peculiarity and distinction by varying style and design, appealing to diverse status groups and strata. The new sociality of the site is placed on the market, but is also – as the name 'club' reveals – related to civil society with its principle of associational self-organization from below. Closer examination of Norwegian fitness clubs has shown how these are creating social bonds, but relations of a new type. The Norwegian researcher therefore created the paradoxical notion of "individualized communities".⁷

Maguire reports a lively case of "gym ladies" in one of New York's low-cost women-only clubs. Their cohesion as an "intimate group" was evidently strong, though they sub-

6 More generally about the configurational analysis of body culture see Henning Eichberg 2001: "Thinking contradictions. Towards a methodology of configurational analysis, or: How to reconstruct the societal signification of movement culture and sport." In: Knut Dietrich (ed.): *How Societies Create Movement Culture and Sport*. University of Copenhagen: Institute of Exercise and Sport Sciences, 10-32.

7 Kari Steen-Johnsen 2004: *Individualized communities. Keep-fit exercise organisations and the creation of social bonds*. Oslo: Norges Idrettshøgskole.

jectively might not regard it as being an original driving force for joining the fitness activity.

Julie: I didn't join a gym for the social dimension; it was just a wonderful, added fringe benefit. (...)

Barbara: The girls from the gym! I always call us the girls from the gym. And Julie's about 30, and Isabelle 78 or 79. There's like a 50-year difference.

Teri: Yeah, I love that. The social part is important because it gets me here and it gets me doing it, because when I wake up in the morning, I don't really feel like working out. If there's nobody waiting for me here, I would just roll over. (...)

Barbara: I come because Teri calls me every morning, at eight-twenty.

Paulina: Or if she doesn't, I do! (Laughs) Especially at Strength & Beauty, we were very tight as a team, you know, and it was just something very ritualistic. We're still very, very close. We celebrate each other's birthday, we go out in the gym group. (...)

Jennifer: You're a clique!

Barbara: Yeah, we are! (Laughs) (p. 77-78).

The significance of the social space is further affirmed by the relative insignificance of *home-exercising* in the current picture of fitness practice. In the time around 1905-30, home-exercising was a main appeal from the side of fitness manuals, being for instance central in the bestsellers of the Danish fitness gurus I. P. Müller and Captain Jespersen.⁸ Nowadays, home-exercise is rather regarded as "lonely or boring" (p. 87).

Between the home and the club, the space of the *jogger* is placed. Individual jogging is certainly a widespread activity, but it is often linked to the phenomenon of *folk marathon*. In these highly popular events, fitness is practiced and displayed as a collective activity, often in festive or even carnival-like forms.⁹ In and by the space of the jogger, new forms of sociality have been created.

The time of fitness is to some extent the *recommended time*: how much the single citizen should spend for his or her health. Recommended time is authoritative time, having public policy character. The authorities of this time regulation are experts from natural sciences, typically from biology and medicine, as well as from public health agencies. These authorities may create some confusion telling once that a moderate level of activity during 30 minutes on at least five days of the week or alternatively vigorous activity for 20 minutes on at least three days should be the standard. While other experts tried to make physical exercise less daunting to overweight or inactive people and proposed three ten-minute sessions of mild physical activity per day (p. 107). However different these recommendations may be, none of them affirms the individuality of time, they are all norms of non-individual, general-biological character.

The real time of fitness is, however, not what people should do, but what they actually do. This is not a question of individual choice either, but fundamentally depending of peo-

8 Hans Bonde 1991: "I. P. Müller, Danish Apostle of Health." In: *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 8, 3: 347-369. – Hans Bonde 1993/94: „Kapitän Jespersen. Ein Erweckungsprediger der Lebensreform.“ In: *Stadion*, 19/20: 5-24.

9 Ronald Lutz 1989: *Laufen und Läuferleben. Zum Verhältnis von Körper, Bewegung und Identität*. Frankfurt/Main: Campus.

ple's *time budget* and their subjective time evaluation, the imagined time budget. It would be naïve to see these two as subjected to the individual's self-determination.

Leisure time is, indeed, shrinking, mainly because of the rise of the dual-income household. This explains the paradox that the single person's working time may be shrinking, but leisure time is shrinking, too. A growing amount of time has to be invested into one's own self-administration. This causes stress. "We can eliminate stress in your life," promises the fitness enterpriser (p. 83). This slogan indirectly affirms the relevance of *stress* as a configurational element of work and fitness leisure. Stress makes people exercise – and exercise creates new types of stress. Anyway, stress is also outside the grip of the individual.

In surveys, the most often-cited reason why people do not participate in sport and fitness is: "not enough time" (p. 83-86, 134). This well-known 'individual' answer to questionnaires reveals at closer examination a clear non-individual dimension: Sociological studies have documented that those groups are over-represented among sport participants who professionally 'lack time'. This seems also to be true for the middle-class, which is dominating fitness activities. The time budget in terms of 'objective' figures, the subjective time budget, the declaration of 'no time' and the practical management of time may not be identified with each other.

Emotion and atmosphere

The individual *motivation* is on closer examination a relational construction, too. Motivation does only to a very limited degree, or not at all, spring from isolated reading of a manual or a magazine, which by its persuading force puts fitness activity into practice. (And by the way, the imagination that the human being steps from reading to practice is not at all 'late-modern', but it pushed already the rich literature market of self-help health, which spread since the late eighteenth century and was linked to names like Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland.) The translation from fitness recommendations to people's real doing, i.e. from literature to bodily practice, requires an intensive investment of *emotional labor*. The personification of this relational work is the personal trainer.

The emotional work of fitness industry is directed towards shaping a certain *atmosphere*, which again is inter-personal. First and foremost, the personal trainer has "got to have a sense of humor"; this is what the owner of an elite health club postulates (p. 163). *Humor* is relational, from-people-to-people. But humor can be different things. One is the smile, which characterizes the iconology of fitness industry – smile on advertisements, smile on the front-page of fitness magazines, smiling personal in the welcome section of the health club. The smile is an interpersonal mark of the selling relation. As Dale Carnegie, the guru of self-improvement, salesmanship and corporate training, underscored as early as in 1936 in his main work *How to Win Friends and Influenced People*:

An insincere grin? No. That doesn't fool anybody. We know it is mechanical and we resent it. I am talking about a real smile, a heart-warming smile, a smile that comes from within, the kind of smile that will bring a good price in the market place (p. 35).

An expression of humor of quite another type is laughter. A woman remembered her first entry into a fitness club, together with a friend, in the 1970s, when this milieu was still a men's domain.

We were the only women, of course. And it was great (...) I was really strong. No one ever thought a woman would ever want to lift weights. It was a feminist thing at the beginning – my friend and I were the only women. We were laughing, and the guys thought we were so weird, but you know, we got the goods! (Laughs). So you got to conform and not to conform, which is always the best (p. 67).

Here, laughter had subversive qualities, challenging and changing the given situation and relations.¹⁰

Relations and reification

The cases of smile, laughter, and emotional work show, to which degree fitness activity is a question of relations. Fitness activity is to some extent linked to *erotic relations*, where women meet men and impress men, while men impress women (pp. 98, 102). An archetype of this imagination is the advertisement, which Charles Atlas launched in the 1930s: "The Insult That Made a Man Out of Mac". Skinny young Mac is bullied at the beach and loses his girlfriend to a better-built aggressor. But Atlas' training program helps him – instantaneously, as it seems – to become a 'new man'. He returns to the beach, takes revenge of the bully, and regains his girlfriend (p. 36).¹¹

Heterosexual relations are, however, only one side of the club world. The health club may also function as a gay milieu. Or it can offer a women-only milieu for females shunning the erotic sociality of men.

The fitness practitioner is *gendered*. And also this means: Fitness activity is relational work, not just individual.

The practitioner is *socially stratified*, the whole fitness world having a middle-class bias and in addition being internally diversified according to social groups and their habitus. Social status and symbolic capital matter.

The fitness practitioner is *ethnic*. African Americans, Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans are relatively absent in the health clubs (p. 93).

And what about the individual data on the screen of the treadmill? These data give a meaning only if they are related to some standard, which is over-individual. The reification of fitness movement in the form of *quantitative results* is not done by an 'individual', but requires a complex social translation between personal practice, technology, trainers, and experts of the biological norm.

Market and public policy

All these basic configurational dimensions – the space, time, atmosphere, relations, and objectifications of fitness – show that the human being is not just what is inside its skin bag. Outside the skin, complex bodily relations of inter-human character connect the practitioner with other people. And these others are not only an additional environment (in Danish *omverden*, the world around), but the relations are inside the body itself, a world inside.

Above this basis of practice with its bodily-cultural differentiations, institutional frameworks and abstract ideas characterize a given movement culture. On this level of super-

10 About the societal differences between smiling and laughter see Henning Eichberg 2008: "Laughing in sports and popular games. Towards a phenomenology of laughter." In: *Le rire européen*. Perpignan: Presses Universitaires. In press.

11 The advertisement is reproduced in Kirkegaard 2007 (footnote 3), 52.

structure, we find the *fitness market*. The fitness practitioner would be no fitness practitioner without the market. The organizational structure of clubs, club chains, enterprises and their mutual market-relations deliver the necessary framework for fitness activity. The fundamental social existence of the practitioner is determined by being *consumer* and being the target of certain *producers*.

It is to a large extent the market that styles the consumer as 'individual' by its iconology of advertisements, its appeals in magazines etc. I am shopping, therefore I am – I am training, therefore I am. But the consumer will just not function as an isolated individual unit, which follows his or her own premises. The greedy consumer is swallowing, the responsible consumer is training.

Here, the state enters the scene. The social integration of personal fitness is enforced by public strategies to make the human being as *citizen* 'responsible' for his or her body and health.

One of the things I talk a lot about is the need to really work on cultural change in America to encourage a culture of personal responsibility, to encourage people to be responsible for the decisions they make in life ... By exercising every day, ... no matter how busy you may seem or how boring exercise may seem initially, it's a part of a responsibility culture (p. 46).

This is how US President George W. Bush expressed the imperative of personal responsibility in a speech in 2003, using fitness activity as icon. In Denmark, the policy of responsibility was copied by the right-wing government, which in 2007 established a ministerial committee *Det Personlige Ansvar* (the personal responsibility), with the minister of employment as chairman and the ministers of exterior, education and culture as further members.¹² The top-down strategy of making-people-responsible touches ordinary people on a level of personal belief. A woman in the 60s argued for her fitness practice:

It's ... a sense of responsibility. That there's only me to look after me. And if I don't do it, no one else will... (p. 41).

The notion of the responsible consumer calls to mind the popular joke saying: 'The world is bad, everybody only cares for himself, nobody cares for me, only I care for me.'

Where the idea of the market is individual consumption and greediness, the idea of the state is individual responsibility. And fitness is a ritual of both the one and the other.

In other words, as a norm filling personal responsibility with concrete contents, fitness has to some extent moved towards the status of a *religion*. The self is expected ritually to serve a larger and more solemn goal, even if this goal is baptized 'the Self' itself.

How ever these norms may be defined, norms are not individual, they are collective. Foucault talked about 'governmentality', the government inside one's own mentality. Self-management follows the rules of the panopticon. And Maguire describes health promotion since the 1970s as "increasing both individual empowerment *and* social control over individual behavior" (p. 46). In other words, the individual empowerment cannot be regarded as independent of a new type of social control. Individualization is a misleading notion as

¹² <http://www.mitansvar.dk/forside>.

far as it is not defined as part of a specific social pattern. It is this social pattern, which the sociologist has to describe, not an imagined nebulous 'age of individualization'.¹³

Fitness as popular movement?

The market and its appeal of consumption is one thing, and public health with its appeal of responsibility is another. But there is a third factor, besides state and market, which we call civil society. Here we find voluntary associations, social movements, networks and not least the existential identity work of human beings who enter into voluntary connections with each other. Maguire writes concerning the 1930/40s: "If *being* a man was wrought with uncertainty, then *looking* like a man became the solution" (p. 37). Or looking like a woman. In both cases, 'looking like' means: the body for the others. This linking of health and appearance is again not just 'individual'.

One may very well ask whether the 'individual' is a euphemism for the disappearance of subjectivity, which Foucault once provocatively had predicted in *Les mots et les choses*: The individual was produced by discourses of biology, language and economy, by a new modern "order of things" around 1800; will it, like a face painted in the sand of the shore, disappear one day when a new wave wipes it out again?¹⁴ We may ask what sort of wave this could be.

Another question is whether the wave of fitness activity has the character of a popular movement, a cultural movement. This is what some observers have suggested. Kasper Lund Kierkegaard described the history of Danish fitness industry under the title "from muscle mass to mass movement".¹⁵ The notion of 'mass movement' is normally used to describe social movements or political movements.

Some configurational elements may affirm this interpretation. Fitness culture is a certain market segment, but not restricted to the market, and it follows a public health strategy, but cannot be reduced to public policy. It has some features of the third, of civil self-organization. However, some important constitutive elements of the cultural movement seem to be missing. Especially, one can hardly find an identity building of the type of 'we, the fitness people', though group identities can be formed like 'we, the girls from the gym', quoted above. An identity of 'fitness people' could be seen in some of the social reform movements, which were active in this field during the period 1900-1914, among nudists, gymnasts, and life-reformers. The social time and energy of fitness was at that time directed towards a 'better world', but is nowadays rather transformed to the adjustment of the single practitioner to the existing social world.

Thus, we find a third side to fitness culture other than the market (fitness industry) and the state (public health); whether this deserves the name of 'fitness movement', requires an in-depth discussion.¹⁶

13 Henning Eichberg 2007: "Glem det 'enkelte individ' – glem Giddens! Om en stor fortælling i effektiviseringssamfundet." In: *Dansk Sociologi*, 18, 3: 91-108.

14 Michel Foucault 1970: *The Order of Things. An Archeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Pantheon.

15 See Kirkegaard 2007 (footnote 3).

16 A certain nearness of cultural movements in the field of sport and body culture and the body culture market of the 1980s was described by Knut Dietrich & Klaus Heinemann 1989: *Der nicht-sportliche Sport. Beiträge zum Wandel im Sport*. Schorndorf: Hofmann. And Knut Dietrich, Klaus Heinemann & Manfred Schubert: *Kommerzielle Sportanbieter*. Schorndorf: Hofmann 1990.

The human being under the competitive state

Anyway, the production of the fit 'individual' raises questions about the new societal situation, which makes this 'individual' appear (and maybe, seen with Foucault, human subjectivity disappear). How can one more exactly describe the societal formation, which formerly was called industrial or capitalist society, for which words like 'society of information' or 'society of knowledge' are rather euphemistic, and notions like post-modern, late-modern, high-modern or reflexive-modern are unsubstantial or meaningless logo-words rather than sociological descriptions?

It may be enlightening to look back to the 1980s, when questions of this type first emerged. At that time, Francis Fukuyama prophesized the end of history, following the triumph of the market over state policy. Future gave a different answer.

The neo-liberalism of the 1980s – during the reigns of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher – prognosticated the end of the national state, being outdated by the global dynamics of the market. What would remain was 'the minimal state'.

Jürgen Habermas had already in 1974 prophesized the end of national identity (and class identity), which would be replaced by people meeting in *herrschaftsfreier Kommunikation*, by communication without supremacy.

The years around 1990, however, saw the genesis of a multiplicity of new (and the reconstruction of older) national states and their worldwide recognition – Scotland, the united Germany, Slovakia, Slovenia and the other ex-Yugoslav states, the Baltic states and the other ex-Soviet republics in Eastern Europe, in the Caucasus and Central Asia...

Prognostics, thus, failed, but what was the crux of the assumptions? The thesis had been that the single citizen had won against state monopolism (in Eastern Europe), the market had won against the state, and 'the individual' had won against previous forms of identity. The surprise of the 1990s, however, was the success of a certain social model, the Scandinavian welfare state under the conditions of international competition. Worldwide, the system of Nordic welfare (Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Canada...) was recognized as the most successful model to cope with the challenges of the global market. The competition on this market was now no longer only seen as competition between multinational corporations, but between national states. And welfare states with their flexible labor market and their solid democratic identity seemed to have the upper hand.

What, then, is the competitive state (*konkurrencestaten*, Ove Kaj Pedersen)¹⁷ as a new socio-political formation? Functioning as an identifiable unit in global economic competition, the welfare state transformed itself. The primary goals, the protection of the weak groups in society, were turned towards mobilizing 'work society', a society of efficiency (*arbejdssamfund, effektiviseringssamfund*).¹⁸ State and market drew closer to each other. Also states standing traditionally far from Scandinavian welfare culture, and having the traditional problems of joblessness unsolved, like the USA, accepted these new premises.

17 Ove Kaj Pedersen 2006: "Konkurrencestaten – velfærd på globale vilkår." In: *Tidsskriftet SALT*, 15, 6: 8-9. – Pedersen 2006: "Velfærdsrapporten som tidsbillede. Et essay om disciplinering og individualitet." In: *Kritik*, 38, 179: 87-99. – John L. Campbell, John A. Hall & Ove K. Pedersen 2006 (eds.): *National Identity and Varieties of Capitalism: The Danish Experience*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press & København: Jurist- og Økonomforbundets Forlag.

18 Michael Hviid Jacobsen & Jens Tonboe 2004: *Arbejdssamfundet – den beslaglagte tid og den splittede identitet*. København: Reitzel. – Also Jens Christian Tonboe 2006: "Dovenskab forbudt – arbejde er alt." In: *Tidsskriftet SALT*, 15, 6: 6-8.

The East Asian 'tiger economies' had developed into a similar direction out of their own traditions.

The new 'human resource management' of the competitive state has, however, also some particular costs. These become visible by people's stress and new types of health problems.¹⁹ Physical activation is a public answer.

My cautious hypothesis is that this societal framework may help to understand the genesis of the fitness-individual at the cross-roads of

- *service industry*, demanding the body-for-others and a certain appearance as self-presentation
- *consumer society*, where the fitness industry offers means for the production of the self
- public strategies of *mobilization*, making the whole population more efficient and productive, but also creating some problems of health and stress, and therefore
- governmental *public health* strategies, addressing the structural problem of stress with an individual solution, called 'your own responsibility'.

The result (or basis) of this new societal formation is a set of paradoxes:

The single person is enlarged and at the same time weakened, both being included in the key-notion of *the individual*. On the one hand, the individual is proclaimed to be the centre of the world, and on the other it is treated as needy, especially in need of moral responsibility and training.

Maguirtes *fit-fat paradox* emerges. The more fitness activities spread, the more overweight is registered. And vice versa.

Dual anxieties are directed towards one's shape and health, as if these two were connected with each other. Fitness is *shape-health*.

Leisure becomes work, *leisure-work*. As Jane Fonda proclaimed already in 1981:

It takes work and time. You are about to begin something that I hope will become a permanent part of your life. It is important to understand that you will only get out of it what you put into it. Toning and firming can begin to show within days, but for a deep, total, lasting effect, you need to work hard and regularly (p. 139).

This could be the slogan of the state of competition: Work hard! Even in your leisure time! And: something for something!

Beneath all this, one may suspect a deeper crisis of identity. The quest for recognition and self-recognition is what drives the practices of shape-health and leisure-work.

¹⁹ For an early evidence from the side of ergonomic research see Jørgen Winkel et.al. 1990: *Kan belastningsproblem lösas lönsamt?* Solna: Arbetsmiljöinstitutet.

Which individualization?

Anyway, the 'individual' is not a societal reality of self-building as such, but it is a social construction, and it has a social-collective history. The individualization of the medieval mystic – God and Me – was different from the individualization of hard work in the Puritan universe of Benjamin Franklin. And the individual of sports and gymnastics in the nineteenth century was different from the individual of modern fitness. At the same time, these two modern figures are connected by certain common features going across the history of modernity. Among these are:

- Mobilization is what matters.
- Measure your results!
- Body work is work and not just the pleasure of the game.
- Fitness is serious. Body work is not social festivity or carnival as the popular competitions were in pre-modern cultures.

So, there is no reason to delineate a particular 'age of individualization'. Instead, the question is: Which individualization?! Which type of individualization can be registered under the auspices of the current state of competition and its society of mobilization, in contrast to other forms of individualization?

Thus, the problem of the so-called 'age of individualization' is related to the general epistemological problem of notions in singular. The culture (instead of cultures), the human being (instead of human beings), nature, the state, society, science... – all these terms may be suspected to hide something. Or even to lie. Sociological precision demands thinking the pluralities.

This lays the ground for a sharp confrontation between the pop-sociological approach of Giddens and Beck on one side and the critical analysis of Foucault and Bourdieu on the other. It is not possible to refer to both of them at the same time.

To conclude in more general terms: Theory is not a way of pasting certain theoretical label words (like self-identity, age of individualization, panopticon, habitus) on one's empirical findings, thus giving these findings an authoritative touch. Theory is a way of abstraction that makes us wiser in the end. This progression happens by working on contradictions. Theory means applying dialectical thinking on the material under study.

Fitness culture is contradictory, this is what Maguire has demonstrated, and this makes her book a standard work of high value. But the theory of the 'individual' is full of contradictions, too. And the study of fitness contributes in an iconological way to a deeper understanding of the paradoxes of 'individualization'.