

“Modifying” the Female Body: women’s bodies and contemporary fitness culture

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We are not born in bodies we have chosen. Women are particularly conscious of this fact, according to the psychoanalytic account of sexual difference, which makes a norm of the male form against a lacking female body. In the second essay of his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud ‘relays’ the primary reactions of the sexes to the reality of sexual difference: “This conviction [that everyone has a genital like his own] is energetically maintained by boys, [and] is obstinately defended against the contradictions which soon result from observation.... Little girls do not resort to denial of this kind when they see that boys’ genitals are formed differently from their own. They are ready to recognize them immediately and are overcome by envy for the penis...” (334). In this story, both the boy’s temporary denial and the girl’s immediate recognition of the lack, though ostensibly opposed, in fact stem from the same valuation of the male as superior. This much-criticised assumption underlying Freud’s recounting of the scene highlights the traditional predication of women’s devaluation on body image. Freud himself hints more than once at this connection. In a footnote he adds to the passage above in 1920, he writes: “The conviction which is finally reached by males that women have no penis often leads them to an enduringly low opinion of the other sex” (334 fn 2). Hence, nature’s ‘failure’ to produce complete bodies of women deprives women of having the ‘desired body’ and imposes on them the task of embodying a natural lack, a lacking nature.

If psychoanalysis ascribes to the dialectic of lacking / having a fundamental role in the experience of sexual difference, anthropology and sociology have no less highlighted how the central categories of making sense of the world involve binarisms such as nature / culture, body / spirit, emotion / rationality, domestic /

public that are in turn aligned to the polarity between woman / man.¹ Implicit in the near universal association of women with nature, there is a notion of nature wanting in spirit, rationality and control, lacking all those supreme values that dominant trends of Western thought define against 'the body'.² The body represents nature and is inversely represented by women whose body proper, like nature, has to be repressed, conquered and tamed in the name of ideals of fullness and control. At the same time however, women's dissatisfaction with their body, registered in modern times in their dutiful preoccupation with dieting, adornment, recourse to cosmetics and even plastic surgery,³ is aimed at their bodily imperfections precisely because they are *not* seen as natural. What is at work this time, is a notion that nature is perfect and that constant effort is required of the body in order to live up to the 'natural' ideal. Women's duty to embody the 'nature' of femininity, the perfect female form, logically presupposes that their categorically 'natural' bodies are again seen as wanting.

The contradiction between these two views of nature, as lack and imperfection on the one hand, and as an ideal of perfection to strive for and maintain on the other, informs much of what has been thought about the female body and also underlies the contemporary fitness rhetoric fast extending its appeal to women in the West. Nevertheless, despite their apparent opposition, these views share a common premise; for in both culture is masquerading as nature, in both it is culture that arbitrates the boundaries of the 'natural' made to coincide with the boundaries of the female body. Therefore, what western culture deems as women's 'failings' by embodying nature either too well (in the view of nature as lack) or not well enough (in the view of nature as perfection), culture again undertakes to 'correct' through a series of bodily transformations. Contemporary gymnastics and fitness culture exemplifies this transformative operation only too literally, for it rests upon a naturalized ideal of a healthy and beautiful body at the same time as it aims to correct the body's natural imperfections.

Body 'power'

Both as discourse, that is, as a nexus of representations, and as practice, gymnastics is characterized by a self-reflexivity of the body not found in other forms of exercise, as for example dance and sports. The latter see the body as a means to the achievement of a higher goal, such as grace, expressiveness, technique or breaking a record. Instead, all fitness and bodybuilding activities are centred around the body itself. The focus of the activity is precisely on improving, correcting, 'building' the body as such, transforming what 'naturally' already is (the body in its lacking state) according to a model of 'nature' (the ideal body).

This emphasis on the body characteristic of gym culture has its origins in the 'new awareness of the body' movement back in the late 1960s that addressed the demand for body liberation; a demand whose contemporary significance is reflected in the shifts of feminist positions on the body. Feminist thought moved

from an initial disregard for the body shown by 'equal rights' feminism around the beginnings of the century on to a 'recovery' of the body along a politics of difference suggested by second wave, post-sixties feminism.⁴ But if the former attitude was meant as a necessary tactics of claiming equal spiritual and political status for women, it also implicitly concurred with body repression that traditionally served to justify misogyny. Instead, the latter strand within feminism inverted the terms of value: it was a positive evaluation of (female) natural corporeality that made all the difference. However, this position left unquestioned, and even reinforced, the patriarchal identification of women with body. In this sense, the call for body liberation no less than its suppression is implicated in the construal of the (paradigmatically female) body as nature; each assigns to culture the task of either freeing or taming what the body 'naturally' already is.

Nevertheless, despite its difficulties, the trend away from the prioritization of mind, spirituality and consciousness that the 'body-awareness' movement heralded has been necessary at least in that it has made it possible to see that "nothing is more material, physical, corporeal than the exercise of power" (Foucault 57). If "mastery and awareness of one's body can be acquired only through the effect of an investment of power in the body", it is urgent to ask with Foucault "what mode of investment of the power on the body is necessary and adequate for the functioning of a capitalist society like ours" (ibid, 56, 58) and, more specifically, what mode of investment of power on the female body, the reproductive body *par excellence*, is necessary for the reproduction of such a society?

Gymnastics and bodybuilding practices raise the issue of power as embodied in extremely direct terms because they modify the body; and to modify does not simply mean to change, to transform but really to 'fashion' according to an accepted norm, to encode the body in dominant meanings and make the body signify them in turn. Gymnastics is one of these "machineries" of culture⁵ that gives bodies significant form through a process analogous to education.⁶ The trans-formative operation at the heart of contemporary 'working out' then presupposes a notion of a trainable body that rests on the modern conception of a changeable self. Since modernity, it has not only been possible but also desirable to change the self as atomised body, and it is this desire-driven obligation to fashion the body according to prevalent medical and aesthetic norms which body-exercise seeks to fulfil. In this context, gym culture emerges as a form of social control of particular significance to women, whose bodies across history have been the subject of normative discourse in more profound, because in more naturally corporeal, terms.

'Working out' the right body

The popularity of regular exercise at gymnasiums as part of an urban lifestyle is conditioned by contemporary conceptions of health and youth predicated on a demand for productivity. Working out at the gym is precisely labouring to produce a healthy body by improving it, and to reproduce it by maintenance work.

What is supposedly a leisure activity, in fact serves productive purposes in a society in which “free time tends to be devoted to maintenance work” (Featherstone 182). Moreover, in acting upon their bodies (rather than letting them be) people ironically feel they enact a more ‘natural’ lifestyle that counters what is seen as the ‘unnatural’ environment of modern urban life. The advertising leaflet for the Greek franchise ventures of Joe Weider International Fitness Gyms illustrates this in an exemplary way. It sells what it calls the “Weider lifestyle,” as both a necessary and the best among the ways of taking care of the self, thus really foreclosing at the same time as it putatively presupposes the possibility of choice. The pictures surrounding the advertising copy (see Figure 1) show people in natural settings carefully combined with other pictures of people working out at the gym. The copy itself starts by enumerating all physical and emotional threats that modern lifestyle poses for our lives and goes on to advise us on how to function better in the very conditions of stressful contemporary urbanism which it claims to offset:

The principles of the Weider lifestyle are based on thorough body exercise, the right diet and the improvement of stamina, fitness and mental health through stress control. Those principles lead to an enhancement of body strength, the excellent functioning of the metabolism and the delay of aging...

Let the Weider lifestyle strengthen us, make us healthy and active and offer us the self-confidence we need at work and in our personal life.

The Weider lifestyle is the best one can offer oneself.
WE WANT TO IMPROVE YOUR LIFE NOT CHANGE IT.⁷

According to the advertisement, the “Weider lifestyle” seeks “to improve our life, not change it”, thus neutralizing the productivity and transformation underpinnings of the notion of ‘improvement’ by which it makes its appeal. By working on their bodies, people come closer to fulfilling their ‘natural’ potential; they become more energetic, confident, healthier, happier, sexually more successful and better workers. Indeed, the labour involved in this process as well as the geography of the gyms suggest something of a factory where standardized production of body forms and images is taking place. High technology machines, enclosed, hygienically-controlled spaces, repetitive routines, fragmentation of the body-product into parts to be exercised in isolation, and uniformity of clothing, all make up a mechanized, productive environment. What is more, by virtue of its implicit concurrence with the principles of productivity and production, gym culture also seeks to control and deter certain forms of consumption; of fattening food, alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, and finally that ultimate consuming force, aging and death itself.⁸

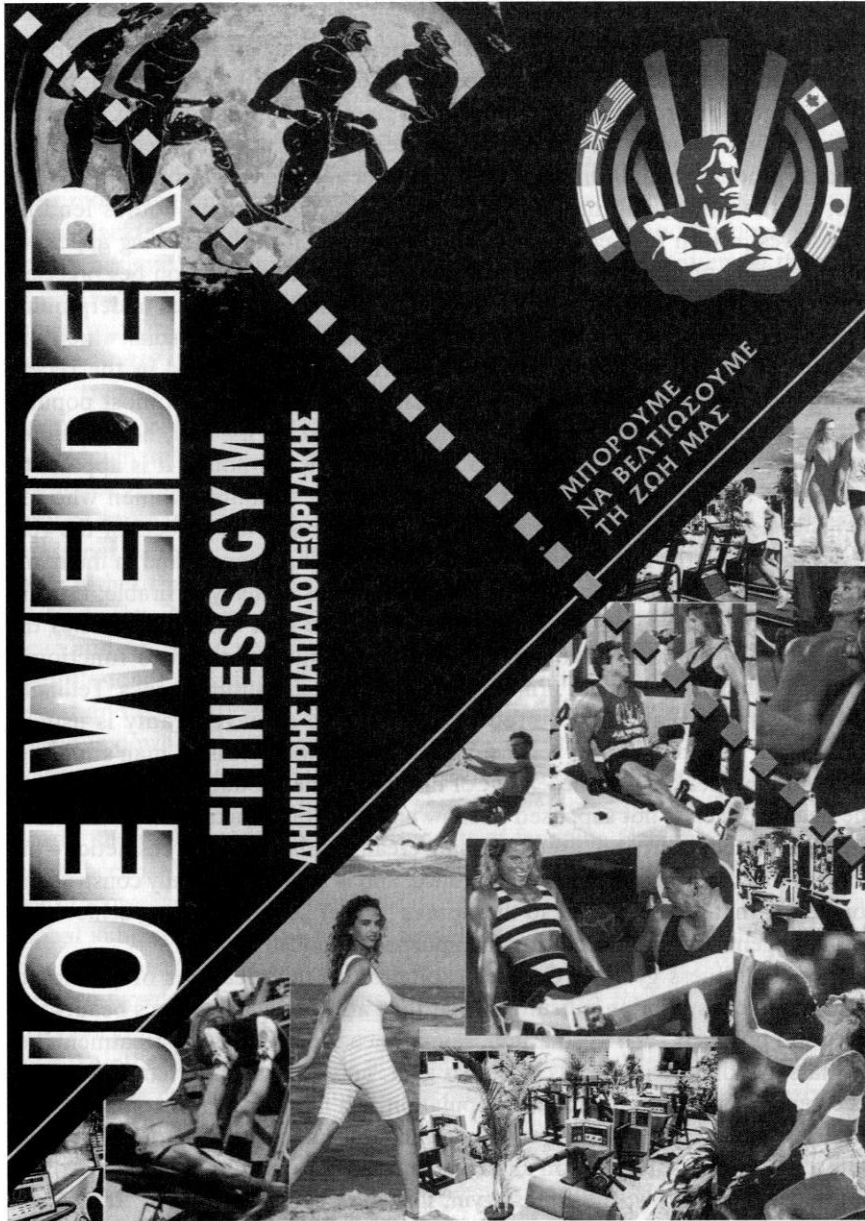


Fig. 1. Joe Weider Gym advertising leaflet.

Consumption of/for a model female body

At the same time however, gym culture emerges as a domain of consumption too, not only because it involves services for sale but also in that it rests upon the consumption of proper food, clothes, and finally a consumption of beautiful bodies through looking. In this respect, women's bodies are produced on the one hand as productive bodies, fit for their reproductive and new professional roles, and, on the other, and more significantly so, as consuming bodies lending themselves in turn to spectacular consumption. Much of the growing appeal of the marketing of gym and fitness culture to the female population lies precisely in its successful envelopment of the productivity and health issues underpinning fitness with an aura of leisure, beauty and consumption; pursuits which are largely associated with femininity. This strategy is illustrated in the recent emergence and contents of fitness magazines: for example, the most popular Greek magazine about fitness is significantly called *Fit for Fun*, hence linking pleasure with the labour required to be and stay fit. Although it is apparently addressed to both sexes, in most of its pictures it is mainly women who are depicted as the subjects of fitness-related practices and the objects of the reader's gaze. Here the female body is made to labour for pleasure and in the name of pleasure, in reproducing itself as feminine, i.e., as sexually desirable. For underneath the rational and scientific rhetoric of the gym culture there lies the imperative of beauty, of women's bodies conforming not just to functional, productive requirements but primarily to aesthetic and consumer ones. Tellingly, the industry and labour required of a woman to achieve beauty is usually suppressed and reduced to leisure and consumption terms; a man's muscles constantly bespeak this achievement of his power, the product of his labour, but the beauty queen is not supposed to show any exertion or activity. We know that she "has dieted, exercised, used cleansing creams, solariums and cosmetics – but none of this really shows in her appearance, and is anyway generally construed as something that has been *done* to the woman" (Dyer 205); something achieved by self-indulgent consumption rather than purposive industry.

Popular fitness gyms in Greece⁹ capitalize on the pleasures of (feminine) leisure and consumption pursuits in that they also provide women's beauty services and products such as solarium, sauna, Jacuzzi, facial beauty treatment, body massage, dietary programs, aerobics gear, and even in-shop hairdressing. In its extended appeal to the female population, the modern gym is comparable to the uses and meanings of the nineteenth century department store:¹⁰ it is not only a place of leisure, fashion and consumption for (mainly) bourgeois women but, most importantly, the fitness gym, like the department store, "transforms industry into a shopwindow" (Bowly *Just Looking* 6). And it does so in a double sense: literally, with its glass walls marking classroom space and the transparent visibility it offers of people labouring at the machines, and figuratively, in that, through industry, women turn their bodies into fashionable objects of display.

Body fitness practices modify women's bodies, it makes them *à la mode*.¹¹ It subjects them to the law of fashion and beauty and thus secures the uninterrupted attachment of bourgeois women to their nineteenth-century duty of 'conspicuous consumption' which functions not only as an index of their social status but most importantly of their femininity, their reproduction as women.¹² For much of the pleasure of women-specific consumption practices is related to their modifying operation which makes up for, at the same time as it relies on, female lack(s), femininity as lack. In this process of body modification, women's bodies become the signifiers of social laws that have been written on them and of that very political economy that has turned them into signs of beauty, fashion and (sexual) pleasure. As de Certeau points out, the writings of the law on the bodies "carry out two complementary operations: through them living beings are ... transformed into signifiers of rules" and, on the other hand, the reason or Logos of a society "becomes flesh" (140).

Women only assume a body by conforming to these codes and practices that normalise them and unify their differences under the heavily aestheticised category of 'woman'. What gym culture, in its alignment with fashion, media and consumer culture constructs as 'beautiful', as a socially acceptable and categorisable rather than a 'sublime' bodily form,¹³ crosses racial and ethnic boundaries and presents itself as a universal aesthetic, although it clearly is a North European and American invention. This standard body consists in being tall, slender, smooth, toned up, efficient, economical, contained, symmetrical, rehearsed, polished and ostentatiously sexy. This standardized, international body-beautiful image is nowhere better embodied than by (typically female) fashion models, whose promotional role in the area of leisure and consumption has, significantly, been extended to the production of aerobics videocassettes available for sale at beauty shops along with other instruments of feminine fashion and beauty. Precisely because women's bodies are traditionally seen as closer to nature, they lend themselves to the ideological inscriptions of the universal. Women's near-global subjection to similar body models is best illustrated in (inter)national beauty contests that rest on western beauty norms. Faced with Belize versions of western women's beauty-contests, the anthropologist Richard Wilk pondered: "Gender transcends the ethnic, but what transcends gender?" (63)

Like other representational machinery and practical tools of fashioning the body, fitness culture has two major operations: "to remove something excessive, diseased or unesthetic from the body or else to add to the body what it lacks, keeping the body within the limits set by the norm of fashion" (de Certeau 147). In this connection, gymnastics may be seen as performing a function similar to that other machinery of femininity: the corset.¹⁴ Exercise, like the corset, makes up for a lack by adding health, tone, shape and emotional control to the body, and on the other hand it subtracts unnecessary flesh, the effects of age, flab and excessive emotionality. Sue Best's summary of the terms of appeal of Berlei corset advertisers to the female consumers in the 1920s reveals a striking similarity to the fitness rhetoric of the late 80s and 90s: "The corset was adding health,

purity and beauty to the body, adding to make up for a lack, subtracting unnecessary flesh, subtracting the deleterious effects of age, subtracting unwanted sexuality and adding morality" (191). Age, health, beauty, sexuality and control are the areas of concern shared by the two types of body discourse that promote different products to women at different times. However, where the analogy between the corset and the hard, fit body fails is precisely on the issue of sexual morality. Whereas 'morality' as an ethic of body and self-control informs both corset wearing and bodybuilding practices, the older repressive, 'cover-up' morality added to the female body by the corset has been replaced by the contemporary moral obligation to build a body fit to uncover. Women remove fat, cellulite, flab and excessive hair from their bodies perhaps precisely because they are also expected to remove their clothes and display their bodies. A revealing example of marketing rhetoric's exploitation of women's duty to beauty and nudity is the print media advertising campaign of FAGE, a large dairy company in Greece, that launched a new dietary product, 'N'joy' milk, with 0% fat and sugar content. The picture shows a (headless) woman in the act of undressing, her body half-naked, while the caption tellingly dares the (typically female) target reader: "*And ... take it all off!*" (see Figure 2). A woman has to be slim to take her clothes off, and to do so is her assumed desire, as suggested in the caption's patronizing use of the imperative mode, the imperative of *mode*. Responding to the contemporary freer dress code and the increasing exposure of women's naked bodies in mainstream media, gymnastics produces a stricter body frame at the margins of the skin; a body fit to be revealed at any time without the aid of corset-like, orthopedic accessories. Again, in most pictures of people working out in fitness magazines and advertising for gyms, women are dressed in fashionable leotards, tiny tops, tight leggings or even bikinis, whereas men are depicted in loose, long-sleeved track suits denoting their involvement in serious training rather than in fashionable body display.

This hard, stylised female body fashioned by gym culture for exposure is related to what Baudrillard, speaking of the female strip show, calls the 'vitrification'¹⁵ of nudity (105); the construction of a smoothly surfaced, flawless, hard body protected from decay that offers itself as a spectacle of plenitude and wholeness. This is a "closed" body "in a constant state of propriety, of flawless abstraction" staging the drama of the fetishist disavowal of castration that women are forced to represent. In this sense, the adding and removing operations of gymnastics on women's bodies and the hard body display it encourages can be viewed as *re-enacting* women's contradictory obligation to both stand for lack and feign plenitude. Women are required to display their lacking bodies so long as/so that the lack is concealed in their immaculate fullness. And this appearance of fullness that women have to work hard for (for the sake of male pleasure) is epitomized in what has been defined as the typically female pleasure, the pleasure women take in themselves as narcissistic beings. The phantasy of plenitude promoted by current, body-conscious fashion and advertising is con-

The advertisement features a black and white photograph of a woman's midsection, showing her waist and hips. She is wearing a light-colored, possibly wet, garment that clings to her body. To the right of the woman is a can of N'joy milk. The can is dark with white and gold text. The word 'NEO' is written in large, bold, white letters above the can. The word 'N'JOY' is written vertically in large, bold, white letters to the right of the can. The can itself has 'N'JOY' written vertically on its side and '0% & 0%' in large, stylized white letters on its front. Below the can, the Greek text 'ΜΟΝΟ 36 ΘΕΡΜΙΔΕΣ ΑΝΑ 100 ΓΡ.' is written in a curved banner. At the bottom of the advertisement, the slogan 'ΚΑΙ... ΠΕΤΑΞΕΉ ΤΑ ΟΛΑ!' is written in large, bold, white letters. Below the slogan, there is a block of smaller Greek text. At the bottom right, the OAGS logo is visible.

NEO

N'JOY

ΜΟΝΟ
36 ΘΕΡΜΙΔΕΣ
ΑΝΑ 100 ΓΡ.

0% & 0%

ΚΑΙ... ΠΕΤΑΞΕΉ ΤΑ ΟΛΑ!

Και βέβαια θα το πετάξεις όλα.
Αυτά που ήξερες, αυτά που νόμισες,
αυτά που σου είχαν πει. Θα πετάξεις το κλειδί,
θα πετάξεις και τα ρούχα σου.
Γιατί αυτό που κρατάς είναι το μοναδικό φρέσκο γάλα
με κακόιο με 0% ζάχαρο και 0% λιπαρά!
Και όσο για τη γεύση τους:
Είναι σφρέματα, σιελόλυτα, σιναγωγόνιστα,
σπυρφόστα, απολυταρικά, κατακόροφα,
ορισόντια και κόβεται σοκολατένια.
Είναι το νέο 0% & 0% από το N'JOY.

OAGS

Fig. 2. 'N'joy' milk advertisement.

sistent with narcissism, typically seen as a constituent of female identity and pleasure but now emerging with a new force. And that narcissistic rhetoric conditions the way in which women both experience and try to negotiate what they internalise as their lacks; it elicits responses of love and hate towards themselves that further motivates their drive for self-improvement. The ensuing ambivalence seems to resonate in Baudrillard's assertion that "the gratification a woman takes from her body and the rhetoric of beauty reflect, in fact, a fierce discipline, an ethics which parallels the one that governs the economic order. This is a planned narcissism, a managed and functional exaltation of beauty as the exploitation and exchange of signs" (111). This calculated and calculating "*neo-narcissism*" characteristic of the contemporary ethos of success "is associated with the *manipulation* of the body as value" (112) and continues to affect women more than men today when women's bodies are publicly fetishised and women's access to social success still largely depends on their looks.

Bodybuilding and gender subversion

It could, of course, be argued that the 'feminisation' of body building activities challenge traditional femininity in that it serves the re-articulation of the boundaries between mind and body, nudity and dress, the inside and the outside, labour and pleasure, production and consumption, plenitude and lack, along the lines of which female identity has been thought. To show how gym culture puts women's bodies into shape, aligning them with dominant, albeit contradictory, norms of feminine embodiment, of femininity as embodiment, does not mean that there are no resistance or empowering uses of gym culture by and for women. Extreme muscularity in women may signify a conscious transgression of the limits of the 'natural' feminine form and the taking on of some of the power associated with men. However, extreme muscularity in women is very uncommon, whereas a moderate degree of muscularity achieved by women has become not only socially acceptable but also increasingly desirable.¹⁶ Inversely, there are mechanisms that counter the subversive potential of competitive female bodybuilding practices by 'making safe' the threatening effects of female extreme muscularity. In fact, one of the noted ironies of hard body-building, of pumping iron, is precisely that "while it suggests a purposive and active production of the body it basically does so in terms of natural gender" (Mansfield and McGinn 57). This, because the development of border-crossing muscularity by women tends to be offset by the cultivation of a more 'glamorous' look through big hair, long nails, appropriate make-up and relevant poses. And, as indicated by bodybuilding contest results, the bodybuilding institution is concerned to keep the line between the sexes by rejecting female bodybuilders who might venture to cross it.¹⁷ The athletic has to be aligned with the dominant gender aesthetic even though the dominant aesthetic has become athletic. Therefore, if the new trend of working out re-articulates those divisions, it does not abolish them altogether.

Still, it can be argued in objection that regular exercise is gender-subversive and empowering for women, in that, similarly to dieting, it may denote the acquisition by women of the masculine skills and virtues of mastery and self-control (Bordo "The Body and the Reproduction..." 18-19). But, as Bordo herself concludes in her analysis of the pursuit of slenderness by women anorexics, the skills of mastery and control that women exhibit by staying thin may equally be read as a self-defeating means for regulation and control of female desire; 'hunger' being a metaphor for sexual appetite or desire for public power. Therefore, Bordo sees in the body of the (typically female) disordered eater "a paradigm of one way in which potential resistance is not merely undercut but utilized in the maintenance and reproduction of existing power relations (15). The connection between compulsive dieting and bodybuilding is briefly pointed out by Bordo in another article, where she sees both as means to "the quest for firm bodily margins", "united in battle against ... the soft, the loose; unsolid, excess flesh" ("Reading the Slender..." 472). In this connection, she detects a continuity of meaning between the two apparently disparate ideals of contemporary femininity: that of the "spare", "minimalist" look and the "solid, muscular, athletic look". Bordo's Foucauldian reading of the concern over slenderness as a form of "tight management" of the female self reveals the double-edged potential of seemingly empowering uses and investments on the female body. However, Bordo's analysis of slenderness, in its focus on eating disorders, mainly stresses the self-monitoring, productivity and desire-management aspects of slenderness and tight flesh as a form of social control and overlooks the fashion and display pleasures of contemporary gym and fitness culture that are also concerned with slenderness. If, with Foucault, contemporary gym-related practices can be seen as a form of social control, they should be seen as not just producing a productive, contained, healthy body but also, and more significantly for women, a beautiful and fashionable body aimed for pleasure. In this sense, they are means of social control "no longer in the form of control by repression but that of control by stimulation. 'Get undressed – but be slim, good-looking, tanned!'" (Foucault 57); and the market provides the promise for meeting those new forms of beauty and fashion imperatives primarily addressed to women.

The fitness industry therefore reproduces the age-old pattern of sexual relations subjecting women to the requirements of being healthy, fashionable and desirable that fulfil their biologically and economically (re)productive roles. And in doing so, it rests upon and hence perpetuates traditional notions of the nature of femininity, of femininity as the embodiment of lack that needs to be compensated for and covered up by disciplined consumption of gym and related beauty products. Hence, a politics of physicality emerges as a particularly ambiguous project for feminism. While the effort required of women to achieve a toned up, healthy, beautiful body may throw into relief the corporeality of power structures as well as have some subversive potential, the ease with which any cultural inscription on the female body slips into naturalisation and turns woman into body contributes in turn to the naturalisation of the terms of gender reproduction in the west and thus makes any radicalisation of women's bodies an impossible task.

Notes

1. For a thorough exposition of the terms by which “a universal asymmetry in cultural evaluations of the sexes” is effected, and more particularly of the use of the category “nature” in association to women, see Rosaldo and Ortner.
2. The typically derogatory evaluation of the body by dominant Western philosophical discourse is discussed by Spelman in the context of its polarity against the mind and the soul in Plato’s work. Spelman further argues that Plato’s misogyny as manifested in his dialogues is intrinsically related to what she calls his “somatophobia.”
3. The common female concern with/over the body is well-illustrated in the modern western world by an increase in eating disorders among women and in their use of cosmetic surgery to “correct” their bodies (70% increase was officially recorded in 1990 over 1981 in the U.S.A). Women subjecting themselves to cosmetic surgery still outnumber men by 7 to 1 and relevant statistics in America have shown that for men, face reconstruction is given priority whereas women undergo plastic surgery mostly on their bodies. More specifically, the most frequent types of such surgery for women are liposuction, breast augmentation and collagen corrections, so the areas of the body women want to “correct” most are breasts, hips and thighs (Synnott 75).
4. For an interesting discussion of these two “generations of feminism” see Julia Kristeva, especially 18-22.
5. I borrow the term “machinery” from de Certeau (147) who defines clothes, automobiles, glasses, cigarettes, shoes, food etc. as the machinery of representation, the codes that shape the body.
6. This analogy between “giving a form to” and “educating” is far from contingent as is suggested by the meanings of the French word “*formation*”: training, education.
7. This is a short extract from the advertising leaflet for the Greek franchise of the Joe Weider International Fitness Gyms available since Autumn 1996 (my translation).
8. I am here referring to the earlier uses of the verb ‘to consume’ meaning ‘to devour, waste, spend, destroy, use up, exhaust.’ This death or destruction association still persists in expressions like ‘consume by fire’ and ‘consumption’, the once deadly disease of pulmonary phthisis. This earlier meaning is also evoked in the negative connotation of the term ‘consumer society,’ i.e., wasteful society that persist alongside more neutral and even positive senses of ‘consumer’ (Williams 68-70).
9. Mansfield and McGinn make a useful distinction between the “chromed-up health spa” and the “hardcore gym.” The former is “associated with meeting the exercise needs of middle class professionals” whereas the hardcore gym is described as “being situated within a discourse which makes the ‘outlandish’ body possible”(51). However, the Greek franchise venture of Joe Weider International Fitness Gyms I use as a prime example presents us with an interesting variation, probably specific to Greek culture. Although the logos (Joe Weider in his youth in a competitive state) and the bodybuilding past of the owner of the gyms in question suggest that it is a ‘hardcore’ gym in the sense defined above, these ventures have managed to achieve a profile of a fashionable fitness centre comparable to a health spa with beauty salon services, a gym gear shop and even a playroom for children! Bodybuilding training is possible along aerobics, jazz and yoga (!) classes and even though the class background of its members is not clear, the actual use of its facilities and classes is gender specific. Women benefit from the beauty and relaxation services and mainly attend aerobics classes whereas the majority of men concentrate on machine work and weight lifting.

Because Greece is a less strictly class-stratified society than most Northern European ones, gender emerges as a more significant factor in determining the profile of such enterprises. Therefore, the minimization of heavy bodybuilding activities and the increasingly 'health spa' profile of most previously or apparently 'hardcore' gyms in Greece are mainly due to their feminization, the amazing inflow of women clientele rather than (just) to their 'bourgeoisification.'

10. About the relation between department stores and femininity, see Rachel Bowlby *Just Looking*, 1-34.
11. Interestingly, there are two modalities of *mode* based on gender. The masculine mode, used in grammar, philosophy and music, generally means form and method, whereas the feminine *mode* came to mean 'fashion,' 'passing practice which depends on taste and caprice.' This telling duality of meanings and of uses of the word is pointed out by Rachel Bowlby "Modes of Modern Shopping" (188).
12. The term 'conspicuous consumption' belongs to Thorstein Veblen, whose discussion of bourgeois women's role as beautifying themselves and their surroundings for display is seminal.
13. In Kantian aesthetics the 'beautiful' attests to the persistence of a general ideal and asserts the generalizability of aesthetic judgements whereas "the sublime" is that which is aesthetic but not beautiful because it can not be represented, it cannot be contained in the codes of the beautiful as defined by a given society. See Hebdige for an interesting discussion of this distinction in relation to popular culture.
14. This analogy between tight, slender, exercised female bodies of today and the corseted body of the typically Victorian femininity has been suggested by Susan Bordo ("Reading..." 482,485) whose insightful work on slenderness throws light on the disciplinary aspects of eating disorders and the "management" of contemporary femininity.
15. The word 'vitrification' is Baudrillard's own and derives from the French word *vitrine*, i.e., 'shop window.'
16. Janet Pugh, for example, surveyed the social perception of women bodybuilders in a competitive (i.e. the phase when the bodybuilder prepares for and participates in contests) and non-competitive state to find that even though most of the male and female respondents found women bodybuilders in a competitive state as inappropriately masculine and hence undesirable, the same women in a non-competitive state (but obviously still quite muscular) were seen as moderately feminine and even desirable. This shows that extreme muscularity is generally perceived as deviant and role-inappropriate for women but on average a well-built and muscled body has become attractive enough to make exercise a new beauty imperative for women.
17. In their analysis of the film *Pumping Iron II; The Women* and of bodybuilding magazines, Mansfield and McGinn offer an interesting exposition of the ironies and contradictions involved in extreme muscularity in women and explore the ways in which female bodybuilders are made safe, i.e. are made 'feminine.' A telling example they refer to is the case of Everson "who has won the most important women's physique contest in the world six times in succession... Everson, in common with many other women at the top of the sport, has adopted the blonde, 'Barbie doll' look of the hyper-feminine, her body heavily muscled, but has not gone beyond the point at which (in the bodybuilding world) it would be regarded as 'too extreme' for a woman. She, more successfully than others, has walked the thin line between muscularity and acceptable femininity by working her body in a particular way to produce the

ideal size and proportions, by adopting a posing style emphasizing dance, grace and creativity, and by trappings of hair and make-up and the like reminiscent of the style adopted by the fictional women of Dallas" (63).

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«Τροποποιώντας» το σώμα της θηλυκότητας: το γυναικείο σώμα και η σύγχρονη κουλτούρα της γυμναστικής

Αγγελική Σπυροπούλου

Εξετάζονται οι πρακτικές και οι αναπαραστάσεις που σχετίζονται με την παραγωγή μιας επιθυμητής μορφής σώματος σήμερα, που λαμβάνει χώρα κυρίως στο πλαίσιο μιας αυξανόμενα «διεθνοποιημένης» κουλτούρας των γυμναστηρίων. Πιο συγκεκριμένα, τονίζεται η έννοια της «τροποποίησης» (modification) του σώματος μέσω της γυμναστικής, για να ευθυγραμμιστεί με πρότυπα που επιβάλλει η επικρατούσα μόδα (mode). Ο προβληματισμός αυτός αφορά ιδιαίτερα το γυναικείο σώμα, το οποίο, τόσο από ιστορικής όσο και ψυχαναλυτικής άποψης, υπόκειται περισσότερο σε κανονιστικά πρότυπα που προβάλλει ο εκάστοτε πολιτισμικο-κοινωνικός σχηματισμός, ακριβώς λόγω της παραδοσιακής ταύτισης της γυναίκας με το σώμα (ως συνήθη μεταφορά της «φύσης») και του ετεροπροσδιορισμού της θηλυκότητας ως έλλειψη. Τέλος, καταδεικνύεται πως η σύγχρονη κουλτούρα που έχει αναπτυχθεί γύρω από το πρότυπο του γυμνασμένου (γυναικείου) σώματος είναι συνυφασμένη με το ισχύον οικονομικό σύστημα και εξυπηρετεί ταυτόχρονα τον πολιτισμικό επεκτατισμό των κυρίαρχων δυτικών χωρών και την (ανα)παραγωγή των παραδεδομένων σχέσεων κυριαρχίας μεταξύ των δύο φύλων, μέσω της σύνδεσής της με τις ηδονές της κατανάλωσης, που πλέον αποτελεί επιταγή, διαγράφοντας το κύριο πεδίο συγκρότησης της ταυτότητας σε αυτήν την ύστερη φάση της νεωτερικότητας. Κατά προέκταση, επισημαίνονται οι δυσκολίες κάθε προστάγματος χειραφέτησης που στηρίζεται σε μια εξ ορισμού θεώρηση του γυναικείου σώματος ως μέσο υπονόμευσης των υφισταμένων σχέσεων εξουσίας ανεξάρτητα από τους τρόπους (modes) μέσω των οποίων αυτό διαμορφώνεται ιστορικά.