Muscle Works

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Muscle Works

Physical Culture and the Performance of Masculinity

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Broderick D. V. Chow

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In memory of

Martin Shui Fung Chow, 1940–2019

and

Terry Todd, 1937–2018

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Muscle Works

Introduction

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Get Jacked Like Me!

2022, London, United Kingdom

It's the 1st of July when I write this, 15 days after my 40th birthday. I'm 5 feet, 10 inches tall and I weigh 91 kilograms or 200 pounds. My body-mass index of 28.6, according to the National Health Service (NHS), means I am "overweight." With my ethnicity ("Chinese," as per the limited tick boxes available in the British census), I am "at high risk of health problems like Type 2 diabetes."

But the NHS online calculator doesn't know I'm jacked and have the receipts to prove it. I can squat 150 kg, deadlift 180, bench 100, snatch 90, and clean and jerk 105. I have a 43-inch chest and 16-inch biceps and 24-inch quads. I can confidently say that I am pound for pound the strongest person in theater and performance studies in the United Kingdom, the United States, or Canada. I am in the best shape of my life, and I owe it all to the joys of physical culture!

It wasn't always like this. I was introduced to the gym in my Grade 9 Physical Education class in Richmond, British Columbia (a city in the Greater Vancouver area, Canada). One month, there were two choices: "Weight Training" or indoor hockey. I knew I was bad at hockey (hey, I was bad at every sport), so alongside ten or so other teenage boys and girls, I entered the tiny weight room behind our massive gymnasium, equipped with creaky machines and a handful of dumbbells. We learned anatomy and were tested on the Latin names of muscles: biceps, triceps, quadriceps. I liked it well enough. I got a membership at the Steveston Community Centre so I could work out in my own time. I read Men's Health *and* Men's Fitness *and started doing free weights. I put my body into resistance machines I didn't really understand for an hour three times a week, to maintain a vague dislike of my body. Headphones in, head down. I knew there was a certain way I wanted to look and there was social pressure to do so. I worried about what would happen if I ever stopped, so I didn't. I think this describes the experience of many men's relationship to the gym. It was a repetitive, timetabled, disciplinary activity that you don't necessarily enjoy, but regardless continue to do.*

It was also kind of embarrassing. I never talked about it to anyone, unlike guys who play sports. I envied men who played sports; the community and masculine camaraderie, the pub bonding that accompanied the ritual of "five-a-side" football, the rough physicality of rugby, all of which felt unbelievably alien when I first arrived, age twenty-four, as a newcomer to the United Kingdom. Sports carried meaning and history and occupied a cultural place as important as Shakespeare or Hardy.

Was I searching for meaning, then, when in September 2014, I found myself googling "Olympic Weightlifting Clubs London?" Coincidentally, my search returned "Brunel Weightlifting," a British Weight Lifting–affiliated club based in the Indoor Athletic Centre (IAC) at Brunel University London, where at the time I was a senior lecturer in theater. I e-mailed the head coach, Mike Pearman, who invited me to drop by one afternoon. Mike is a three-time Olympian, having competed for Great Britain in 1964, 1968, and 1972.[1] *He comes from a weightlifting family. His father was a London champion who ran a weightlifting club in his back garden in Brixton, South London. When I got to the IAC, Coach Pearman was already there, doing some presses and squats with light weights on the bar. I introduced myself and he told me about the club and his lifters. "And sometimes I do a bit myself, for my sins," he said. "Get your kit on and I'll take a look at you." "How old are you," he asked. "32," I replied. "I was retired at 36, you know. Just from your age, I can tell ya, you'll never snatch bodyweight. How heavy are you? 70, 72 kgs?"*

"82," I replied. It was true at the time.

"You're heavier than you look."

Despite this unencouraging beginning, we ran through some weightlifting positions. My mobility surprised Mike. "Most men your age can't keep their arms above their head like that in a full squat," he said. "You keep at it, you will snatch bodyweight."

Two days later I met Kristian McPhee, one of Mike's athletes, who became my coach and friend. Kristian was there training himself, but he took me through the basics, sharing the platform with me. I did a snatch for the first time, with the empty bar, and a clean and jerk with maybe 40 kg. Kristian was hitting snatches on 90, or 100. Two of the other competitive lifters, Lewis and Andy, lifted even more. The atmosphere was unintimidating, but the lifts themselves scared me. Both involve a kind of magic against gravity. The first phase ("pull") uses brute strength to get the bar off the ground. In the second, the lifter shrugs and extends through the legs and back to push the bar into the air with the hips. There is a moment when the bar is weightless in the air, and in that fraction of a second you must dive under the bar to "catch it." And then you have to stand up. The movement is so complex that the attrition rate for weightlifting is extremely high: "Most guys never come back after the first session," Kristian told me. A warning, an offer, a commitment.

Eight years later, I can confidently call myself a weightlifter. Weightlifting remains a defining part of my identity. Training five times a week, on average for ninety minutes, I spend an entire day each week picking things up and putting them down. I have lifted in gyms in London, New York City, Vancouver, Hamburg, Austin, and Montréal. I have shared platforms with students as well as professors of political philosophy. I have spent an entire weekend at a weightlifting training camp with fifteen other lifters. I compete. In 2016, I took a Level 1 British Weight Lifting Qualification in Coaching Weight Lifting, and I now teach newbies the basics of the snatch, clean and jerk, squat, and deadlift. And in 2019, back home to visit family in Richmond, BC, I finally snatched my bodyweight: 91 kg, training on my own indoors at CrossFit Overdrive, while the other guys played basketball outside in the sun.

I'm not going to try to convince you, the reader, that you too, could be like me. That would be what usually happens in these kinds of narratives. Take, for instance, an interview with Eugen Sandow—the prototypical bodybuilder—in the December 1924 issue of Muscle Builder, *where he tells us: "I was born without any particular qualifications as a potential strong man. I might even have been considered a sickly lad in appearance. What I have done with my body, I attribute wholly to daily exercise—daily without fail."*[2] *More recently, in the May 2021 issue of* Men's Health, *the Chinese Canadian actor Simu Liu tells us that he wants "you to see yourself as a superhero," and you can do that, with a simple workout that combines heavy anaerobic lifting with high-intensity cardiovascular exercise. Just five minutes on the Assault Bike, followed by 5 sets of 5 reps Banded Trap Bar Deadlifts, 5 sets of 5 reps Box Jumps, 5 rounds of 20 yards Sled Push to Sprint, 3 sets of 5 reps (per side) Rotational Medicine Ball Slam, 3 sets of 15 reps Lat Pulldown to grow some wings, bro; and finally 3 sets of 15 reps Dumbbell Lateral Raise to make those delts pop.*[3] *I won't try to convince you, reader, because I know that getting jacked, swole, built, ripped, cut is a performance above all else. If there's one secret to getting jacked like me, that's it. You have to act jacked, if you're going to be jacked.*

Embodied Archives

On the evening of November 30, 1901, the Memorial Hall on Farringdon Street, London, played host to the Health and Strength Physical Culture Display, an exemplary instance of a form of theatrical performance that gave rise to our modern fitness culture in the West. The show might best be categorized as "variety theater." An advertisement for it shows a mixed program of music (the London Viennese Band), light comedy (Miss Esme Beringer and Mr. George Silver, performing their duologue: "The Art of Fencing 300 Years Ago"), and feats of strength and athleticism ("human

juggling" by the Brothers Spencer, the strongwoman Giantella, and exhibitions of wrestling, boxing, and exercises with dumbbells and Indian clubs to music).[4] The headline act was a form of early bodybuilding exhibition: the weightlifter Launceston Elliott stripped to his shorts and gave a "series of Classical Poses in an Illuminated Posing Frame."[5]

This spectacle would be a minor footnote in theater history if not for two factors. First, the advertisement was clipped from an unknown publication and pasted into a scrapbook by Ottley Coulter, a vaudeville strongman and physical culture historian. Beside the advertisement, Coulter pasted clippings of Elliott flexing, and the clippings' different states of aging suggested they'd been drawn from multiple publications making up part of the media apparatus that disseminated what we now call "physical culture," a movement originating in Europe and America that prefigured modern day "fitness." Coulter did not date or label anything, so his scrapbooks are a nightmare from the point of view of facts and figures. They might be a minor collector's curiosity if not for the intervention of the late Professor Terry Todd, who drew on Coulter's collection for his PhD dissertation on the history of resistance exercise and later, with his wife Professor Janice Todd, brought Coulter's materials to the University of Texas at Austin.

The second factor that saves the Health and Strength Physical Culture show from disappearing as a mere curiosity is that its ideals, propositions, and values of purposeful bodily self-improvement continue to be embodied and practiced in our contemporary culture of fitness. While Memorial Hall may be gone, replaced in 1969 by British Telecom's Caroone House, the influence of the performance can be seen today just a few yards away at the Farringdon branch of Gymbox, a large underground gym where boxers, wrestlers, and gymnasts train alongside weightlifters, powerlifters, and bodybuilders, and where I now train four to five times a week. Coulter's shard of ephemeral evidence demonstrates this book's central premise: contemporary mass-cultural forms, practices, and categories of physical culture and fitness originated in the performance forms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Anglo-American theater, and thus, in its contemporary incarnations we can see a persistent politics of theater, antitheatricality, performativity, trickery, aesthetics, and beauty. Approaching the physical culture archive as a theater historian, I propose, produces an important counter-genealogy for muscles and manliness—a history that has often been read through the contexts of science, ideology, and nationalism. It is by looking at performing bodies that we can come to a full understanding of the history of a practice whose archive is riven with gaps, inconsistencies, and falsehoods. By looking at the body in its fleshly, sweaty labors—which cannot be fully preserved in the archive—we can understand how the theatrical performance of physical culture in Britain, North America, and western Europe in the late nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries shaped our models of built and fit masculinities in the present.[6]

Muscle Works traces the imbricated relationship between nineteenth and early twentieth-century physical culture and the theater and performance cultures of the same time, and in doing so demonstrates how the performance of physical culture contributed to both the construction and deconstruction of dominant forms of masculinity, both historically and in the present. However, while the book builds on analyses of physical culture as a reflection of the organization, disciplining, optimization, and "sculpting" of the body in industrial and post-industrial capitalism, my methods, drawn from theater and performance studies, attend to queer, fugitive, and "otherwise" forms of corporeal being and being-with that emerge from the fraught ideological spaces of the gym and the (competition) stage.[7] These aims are realized in and through what might be called the "physical culture archive." But what kind of archive is this? Before moving on, I wish to dwell on the nature of this book's "archive"; and the multiple objects of analysis, temporal and geographical contexts, and methods I deploy to think through the history of men's fitness as, and along with, the history of theater and performance.

Julietta Singh, in her book *No Archive Will Restore You*, ruminates on the stakes of the "archive": the archive is the "right stash of materials . . . sexy enough to sell ourselves."[8] It is a magic word: "calling what you study an 'archive' gives it heft, grants it the status of an intellectual pursuit."[9] As a performer-artist turned scholar, I wondered about calling myself an "archival researcher." I felt myself an impostor among folders and finding aids; transmuting my interest, my practice, my life in the gym into something that would produce value in the form of research, publication, and REF output.[10] Like many other historians of physical culture, I have relied on the personal collections brought together by Jan and Terry Todd. Jan and Terry were themselves major figures of physical culture as champion powerlifters, and Jan continues to be a key voice in the industry through her organization of the annual Arnold Strongman Classic. With the institutional support of the University of Texas at Austin, in 2010 the Todds established the H. J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, providing an official archival home for the personal collections of dearly departed friends and acquaintances from the "Iron Game" that they had collected over the years. This archive is climate-controlled and occupies a 27,500-square-foot space on the fifth floor of the Darrell K. Royal Memorial Stadium on the Austin campus. The center publishes a journal, *Iron Game History*, and a book series; and with UT's Department of Kinesiology and Health Education it hosts both undergraduate and doctoral students in physical culture and sports studies. In this respect, the Stark Center might be called the "official" archive of physical culture, dedicated to "preserving the history of physical culture and sports."[11]

However, an institutional space cannot fully account for what the physical culture archive is. The physical culture archive is a relation, or an entanglement of relations: how practices were promoted, spread, and performed by bodies around the world. But the traces of these relations of sets, reps, and techniques are often ephemeral or simply nonexistent. Coulter's scrapbooks are a prime example. They are an enormous collection of primary sources lacking any official forms of citation or organization except for loose thematics ("Strongmen," "Weightlifting"). Coulter did not demonstrate archival "rigor," a term the queer performance scholar José Esteban Muñoz notes is "owned, made, and deployed through institutional ideology."[12] Muñoz's intervention into the academic protocols of evidence, proof, and rigor suggests that performance scholarship is motivated by "a queer impulse that intends to discuss an object whose ontology, in its inability to 'count' as a proper 'proof,' is profoundly queer."[13] Muñoz reads "ephemera," traditionally defined in historiographic terms as collected materials originally intended to be discarded, as "all of those things that remain after a performance, a kind of evidence of what has transpired but certainly not the thing itself."[14] Understanding ephemera as evidence attends to the minoritarian (queer, racialized, otherwise minoritized) subject's acts of world-making and the traces of lived experience that are not or cannot be saved in official and institutional forms. Without intending to institutionalize the physical culture archive as a "queer archive," my research follows this queer path of attending to ephemera as evidence of performance, which I argue is indeed most appropriate for an archive of an embodied practice primarily composed of mass-produced and disposable magazines, cheaply printed photographs, scraps of training notebooks, and mimeographed training logs. The sum of this ephemera, too, can never be the full story, because it is practiced and performed by bodies and is sometimes enacted in surprising ways at local and individual levels, from colonized subjects working out their bodies as resistance, to physical culture magazines becoming jerk-off *and* workout material for gay men.[15] In a similar way, singular historical, economic, and ideological narratives of physical culture are unable to account for the intensely affective, sensate moments of actual bodily practice that are its very substance.

If ephemera "reformulates and expands our understandings of materiality," so too does performance itself as evidence.[16] What knowledge is contained by a "rep" (i.e., a single repetition) of an exercise? Consider a classic bodybuilding exercise like a bicep curl, which takes a quotidian gesture (bending the arm at the elbow) and transforms it into a gesture that is both performative (it does something to the body—it makes the bicep bigger) and theatrical (it expresses and emphasizes the idea of "biceps"). To quote one of my interlocutors, bodybuilder Peter Moore, it is the difference between "an arm and 'an *arm*.' " Perhaps every rep in the present is, as Rebecca Schneider discusses in her study of Civil War reenactments,

"a queer kind of evidence."[17] As Singh states, the body itself is also "an impossible, deteriorating archive," and that body-archive, for me, necessitates the intervention of theater and performance studies, which can, if sometimes only in a speculative way, establish not only what happened, but what such happenings felt like.[18] In other words, it can establish not just the evidence of events but emotions, intensities, and even intentions: pleasure, pain, technique, transformation, and desire; contraction and extension; muscles, tendons, and fascia; the tension between wanting and wanting to be a body; the phenomenology of being "out of place" or "in the zone"; the vascular climax of the pump,[19] the euphoria of a 1RM,[20] the restriction of DOMS;[21] failure, exhaustion, the body's boundaries and the minute space—just the size of a micro-tear—beyond. All the body's dynamic tensions, experienced in the intentional, purposeful work of physical culture. But the physical culturist's body-archive can never be an individual and fixed source of knowledge. Singh notes that there are no "easy binary demarcations of 'inside' and 'outside' " the body, because we are "made up of an outside world which constitutes, nourishes, and poisons us in turns."[22] The bodies of physical culturists are built in relation to other bodies, institutions, objects, machines, food, air, water, hormones, synthetic or otherwise, and digital culture.

Going into this ephemeral, relational, and embodied archive felt intimidating, especially in the beginning. I was always struck by how much was contained in Jan Todd's eidetic memory of people, places, moments, events, like an expanded family tree of how physical culture came to be. The fact that this was also Jan and Terry's history motivated Jan's life's work. Once in 2017, we were chatting while looking through the Estonian wrestler and weightlifter George Hackenschmidt's papers and Jan said to me, "I know that it isn't very fashionable to not use theory, but my aim is really just to tell the story of what really happened." We were speaking about what appeared as a gap in Hackenschmidt's story, a description of his time spent under the mentorship of Dr. Vladislav von Krajewski (to which I return in chapter 5). Jan said, "I wish there was something that gave an indication of what really went on." I politely disagreed. For me, the gap in the historical record is what is most productive, and is what aligns this project with minoritarian historical scholarship, even if this book at first glance seems to focus on majoritarian (white, male, normative) bodies.

For example, Melissa Blanco Borelli argues that to work on the history of the *mulata*, a figure marginalized from official Cuban history, requires the historian to think through rumor and gossip—that is, speculation—forms of discourse often incompatible with "established prescripted ways to remember and materialise history through archives and other discursive practices."[23] Lisa Lowe deploys the concept of "past conditional temporality" against the way in which colonial violence is subsumed within "narratives of modern reason and progress" by "the archive that mediates

the imperatives of the state."[24] Thinking about the "past conditional temporality" of the "what could have been" aptly symbolizes the space of "a different kind of thinking, a space of productive attention to the scene of loss, a thinking with twofold attention that seeks to encompass at once the positive objects and methods of history and social science, and also the matters absent, entangled, and unavailable by its methods."[25] In a similar way, I'm interested in what might have been, as well as what could have happened not only to counter official narratives, but also to attend to the way the physical culture movement was and is always-already multiple and polyvalent, many things at once. Hence, my refusal of singular historical, economic, and ideological interpretations of physical culture as heteronormative, colonial, patriarchal, imperial, eugenicist, fascist, utopian, and white. Certainly, all these forces were at work in physical culture, but at the same time no singular meaning can capture what physical culture means for any physical culturist. In *Muscle Works*, therefore, my use of archival materials is both capacious and extremely partial. Each of *Muscle Works*' chapters explores a different "logic" of physical culture performance that emerges from and within different temporal and geographical contexts: Hypertrophy, Transformation, Strength, Failure and Recovery, Grappling, and Mirror. The book begins in the music halls and vaudeville theaters of London and New York and expands to take in a Lancastrian artist's model, American wellness cures, an abandoned musical about bodybuilding, the philosophical writings of an Estonian wrestler, an independent gym in Scotland, a famous Hong Kong martial artist, and a strip of white sand beach in southern California. These logics do not strive to give a "full" picture of the history of physical culture; instead, they enable different ideas that appear in a fragmented or ephemeral way in the archive to be discerned as part of a whole, like the experience of training where a series of fragmentary exercises ultimately trains the entire body (though of course, never a unified, "finished" one). Just as Kélina Gotman mobilizes "choreography" (how movement is organized) as a method to reveal the historical contingency of taken-for-granted scientific ideas, I am interested in "theatricality" (the material underpinning of the work of "showing") as a historical method to understand images of masculinity that are often taken as essential or universal. In doing so, I reject the impulse to address the "gaps" in knowledge or even to "build upon" the work of Jan and Terry, my friends and mentors, and those other scholars who have come before me. My "contribution," as it were, is not to decipher "what happened" but to ask what was and is possible.

I remember when I visited the Stark Center in 2019, just after Terry had died, Jan said to me that the center would always be like another home to me. It strikes me now that the Todds' archive work is a kind of "homemaking"—not an institutional attempt to tell "the" story of physical culture, but a practice of care for the embodied legacies of their

relations, represented in boxes of ephemera that might otherwise lie moldering in basements and attics. The Todds' orientation toward physical culture history is what Eve Sedgwick might call "reparative," that is, motivated by love, desire, pleasure, and sustenance.[26] Archival work of this kind points to queer forms of kinship: embodied relations that move across boundaried and bordered spaces of the work, family, and nation (a theme I return to in the book's coda on the "chosen family" of the original Muscle Beach). As a multiply minoritized person who found that the practice of physical culture enabled the reintegration of my embodied self, shattered through my exclusion from heteronormative white masculinity, the reparative and "embodied approach" of my research is a way—the only way—to make sense of a disconnected, fragmented, and ephemeral archive that has so often been aligned with the normative, dominant, and powerful. Therefore, *Muscle Works* challenges the hegemonic discourses (of masculinity, whiteness) that surround physical culture, by revealing the reparative work that underlies their formation. That so much of this work was and is "theatrical" motivates the primary argument of the book.

Sculpting Masculinities: Performativity and Theatricality

The idea that the fit, muscular, and strong male body is a transhistorical and transcultural ideal is difficult to shake. Physical culturists evoked Greek and Roman ideals, made visible by ancient statuary like the Farnese Hercules.[27] Their modern descendants reach for pseudo-evolutionary ideas of the body. In a guest article for the website "The Art of Manliness," Erwan Le Corre, founder of the physical education system "MovNat," writes: "Physical development followed a natural path that was determined by the practical demands of life in a wild landscape as well as the vital need to avoid threats and seize opportunities for survival."[28] Le Corre's MovNat system is illustrated by pictures of shirtless men in "natural" environments, doing fitness exercises their Cro-Magnon ancestors would do: carrying logs through the forest, hanging on tree branches, wading waist deep in streams, sparring with each other. The illusion would be convincing were it not for the whiteness of the men in the images, the technical fabric board shorts they all wear, and their uniformly muscular and ripped physiques.

This book began as a research project funded by the United Kingdom's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) to investigate physical culture and the performance of masculinities. The project was to be the first to explore men's fitness from a theater and performance studies perspective. However, as I explored the physical culture archive, I came to conclude that theater and performance are not merely a useful lens by which to understand fitness. In fact, it was in the popular theater of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that many of our contemporary

forms of physical training were invented, popularized, and disseminated. Take, for example, the sociologists Jesper Andreasson and Thomas Johansson's concise history of physical culture in *The Global Gym*. They trace the roots of physical culture to the gymnastics movement in Germany, Sweden, and Denmark, which then led to the refinement and development of techniques for muscle-building, which were spread by pan-European pioneers such as Max Unger, Lionel Strongfort, Eugen Sandow, Kate Sandwina, and Charles Atlas.[29] But the fact that all these figures who spread the message of physical culture did so through *stage performances* in the vaudeville theater and music halls is not explored in detail. Nevertheless, the "physical culture show" was ubiquitous, from the weightlifting displays at local clubs to the strongman turns of the British music hall and American variety show, the gymnastics and bodybuilding displays of Muscle Beach performers Abbye "Pudgy" Stockton, Jack Lalanne, and Steve Reeves, and to the world of professional wrestling. This rich history has been almost entirely forgotten, on both sides of the fence. The implications of the theatrical nature of physical culture have not been fully considered by sports historians or social theorists, and conversely, theater historians might sometimes mention Eugen Sandow, but mainly as a kind of curiosity, despite his enormous influence on modern male body culture.

In this book, I show how contemporary fitness practices originated in the nineteenth-century popular theater as spectacles of strongmen, bodybuilding, acrobatics, and wrestling, and in the twentieth century these legitimated themselves into practices of fitness and health. This point of origin historicizes the idea of the fit body, making clear its relation to industrial capitalism and severing mythic notions of an unbroken connection to the ancient Greeks or the prehistorical "natural."[30] But it also prompts a new reading of fitness in everyday life, as a form of conscious, agential, individually motivated performance, with the gym as both stage and rehearsal room. Gym culture today has tried its best to forget and even to reject its theatricality, because Western culture has been suspicious of the theater ever since Plato declared that poets must be banished from his ideal republic because they traded in mimesis, a false, degraded version of reality. Theater has always been associated with excess and inauthenticity. To be "theatrical" is to be too much, too loud, too *extra*, and worst of all, too showy. Thus, thinking of physical fitness as theater challenges its claim to scientific truth, its disciplinary procedures, and its ideology of authentic self-improvement. As Marx and Engels might say, theater is the "specter" haunting fitness, a revenant of fakery, illusions, and shadows, not to mention loose morals, deviance, femininity, and queerness.

Despite this theatrical history, in everyday life, fitness is often a means to an end. Obesity in the United Kingdom is presented as a significant public health challenge.[31] The solution is exercise, communicated as a series of imperatives. Do at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity

and strength exercises on two or more days a week that work all major muscle groups.[32] But fitness itself can be a problem. Addiction to exercise, "bigorexia" and muscle dysmorphia, and the use of anabolic steroids and other performance-enhancing drugs are all presented as examples of when fitness goes "too far."[33] However, thinking about the theatrical origins of fitness frames it as neither a solution nor a problem, but as an *expressive activity* in itself, shifting the discussion to other benefits that the practice of fitness can bring: new friendships and relations, mental well-being, a philosophy of the world. The performance of fitness, I suggest, avoids the singular narratives of cultural inscription that have dominated in physical culture studies—in which bodies are socially constructed through disciplinary practices—by reminding us of the agency of the performer and their ability to derive value and meaning from embodied practice, and by forging a space for the variation and subversion of cultural scripts, including the scripts of masculinity.

What masculinity "is" and how it has been culturally constructed is a live question in the third decade of the twenty-first century, with debates around gendered violence, structural misogyny, and homophobia bringing the term "toxic masculinity" back into circulation.[34] There is also growing awareness of the way orthodox masculinities harm men too, evidenced by the current and growing fifteen-year-high rate of male suicides, and the difficulties many men have in seeking help for mental health problems.[35] The world of physical culture is a particularly contested site because the strong, athletic, muscular male bodily ideal has long been a symbol of masculinity itself—what George L. Mosse calls "the Image of Man." Athleticism, muscularity, and physical prowess afford privilege, though this privilege is undercut by other factors—a Black, queer athlete's privilege is fundamentally different from a cisgendered, heterosexual, white male athlete. As questions of what it is to "be a man" become increasingly urgent, a consideration of this defining bodily ideal and how it is constructed and performed is also necessary.

Considering masculinity as a practice—in other words, something "done" rather than something that one "is" or a trait one possesses[36]—is central to influential theories in masculinity studies, including Raewyn Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity and Pierre Bourdieu's theorization of masculinity as *habitus*. Connell's relational model of gender suggests that the interaction of relations of power, production, and desire with bodies we take to be "men" and those we take to be "women" produces a structure she calls "hegemonic masculinity," defined not as "a fixed character type" but rather as "the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable."[37] Like Antonio Gramsci's analysis of hegemony as the maintenance of power through cultural and ideological means rather than direct force, hegemonic masculinity describes the "currently accepted" hierarchy that

positions a certain set of characteristics at the top, with other forms of masculinity playing subordinate and complicit roles.[38] For Connell, the worship and elevation of athleticism is one of the means by which the power structure of hegemonic masculinity is maintained in the West. She writes: "the institutional organization of sport embeds definite social relations: competition and hierarchy among men, exclusion or domination of women. These social relations of gender are both realized and symbolized in bodily performances."[39] The bodily performance of sport enacts gendered relations, but simultaneously, gendered relations call certain bodily performances into being. Iris Marion Young's essay "Throwing like a Girl" argues that young women often underestimate their force and power through a cultural script rather than through biological difference.[40] In other words, gender emerges dialectically from the body's encounter with cultural scripts, rather than a one-directional cultural inscription. In this "body-reflexive practice," bodies are "both objects and agents of practice" and "practice itself form[s] the structures within which bodies are appropriated and defined."[41]

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's book *La Domination masculine* argues that gender relations are enshrined in *habitus*, that is, through the practical doing of everyday activities that divide the world into an opposition of feminine and masculine. As with Connell, bodies and their activity construct the opposition between masculine and feminine, but this structural opposition also constructs bodies. Bourdieu writes: "Because the social principle of vision constructs anatomical difference and because this anatomical difference becomes the basis and apparently natural justification of the social vision which founds it, there is thus a relationship of circular causality which confines thought within the self-evidence of relations of domination."[42] This passage resonates with how Judith Butler, in *Bodies That Matter*, troubles the often-accepted distinction between (biological) sex and (performative) gender. Sexual difference (the material body), she argues, is already determined by discourse, for it is the discourse that assigns biological difference to gendered categories of "male" and "female."[43] In other words, speech acts such as "It's a girl!" are how material differences come to "matter." Returning to Bourdieu, the somatization of a symbolic gendered division accomplishes two things: it naturalizes gendered performances and dispositions (so that men are "naturally" competitive, for example), and it de-historicizes the gender order. Sport is particularly policed in terms of gender division, even though, as Jennifer Doyle reminds us, "the administrative violence of the process of distributing bodies across a gendered dividing line is hidden beneath a sense of a natural sexual order."[44] In sports, Doyle notes, "sexual difference is taken to precede sports structures. But the fact is that regulated physical practices *produce* those differences."[45] An example is women's Olympic weightlifting. David Brown notes that the acquisition of strength

by women continues to be policed by a circular process that enshrines a cultural norm into physical capacity, "through an appeal to what is *natural*."[46]

At the same time, as Young, Brown, Connell, and Doyle all note, while sport may be a system where the sex/gender order is regulated and policed, it also offers the possibility for the subversion of this order. Doyle writes: "People who live their sexual bodies from minoritized positions—as, for example, Black femme, effeminate teenage boy, transman, mother, Indigenous, gay—experience a kind of static when they step into the space of sport. They inhabit noisy bodies, especially when, as athletes, they defy the ideological structures which tell us what kinds of capacities are organic to what kinds of bodies, and what kinds of bodies are organic to what kinds of sports."[47] In this project, I build on the idea of "noisy bodies" by exploring how physical culture practices, rooted in excess, hyperbole, emphasis, and enhancement, which is to say, theatricality, produce "static" as their modus operandi. Men's physical culture, historically and today, creates static because it is paradoxical: a normative practice that aims at producing an extraordinary body. Such dysphoric states have often been understood in pathological terms, for example, muscle dysmorphia or "bigorexia." While not dismissing the validity of such diagnostic tools, I suggest that we might also understand them through the lens of theatricality in everyday life.

In Judith Butler's 1990 essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," she argues that gender is a totality of "a stylized repetition of acts," rather than "a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed."[48] In other words, gender is not a substantive *thing*, but rather an "illusion" constituted in much the same way as a role on stage is built, through "bodily gestures, movements, and enactments" (as well as other important theatrical signifiers such as costume, voice, set, and so on).[49] While gender may be a "performance," this performance is not an independent choice; social actors are compelled to perform gender along a binary system through larger historical social structures such as kinship and taboo, which enforce the reproduction of compulsory heterosexuality. She writes:

> The body is not passively scripted with cultural codes, as if it were a lifeless recipient of wholly pre-given cultural relations. But neither do embodied selves pre-exist the cultural conventions which essentially signify bodies. Actors are always already on the stage, within the terms of the performance. Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives.[50]

Butler is a frequently cited theorist in theater and performance studies (and "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" was originally published in *Theatre Journal*), but her understanding of theater is somewhat narrow. Butler maintains J. L. Austin's distinction that a performative act is "in a peculiar way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage."[51] "Gender performances in non-theatrical contexts," she writes, "are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions," because in the theater, one is able to say "this is just an act."[52] However, as Rebecca Hardie points out, Butler's argument is applicable primarily to realist theater practices that present the illusion of reality yet maintain the protective notion that what is happening on stage is not real.[53] Practices such as feminist performance art that disrupt the binary between the fictional and real, onstage and off, complicate Butler's reading of theater and its ability to challenge and resist the social forces that construct gender. In a similar way, by looking to the *popular theater* of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in which dramatic realism was not the goal, I supplement gender and masculinities studies by demonstrating that masculinity is often a *theatrical* act as much as a performative one.

Theatricality, as defined in this book, is a conscious, intentional act to convince, impress, or even "wow" an audience. It is often associated with excess and decadence. Indeed, theatricality itself can result from the failure of the illusion, rather than its performative success.[54] If it was in the theater that contemporary models of built masculinity emerged, the ideal was always-already under threat of undoing itself. Bodybuilding contests and strongman acts may have established our manly norm, but they also exposed that norm to the critical gaze of the spectators, who could judge it as "trying too hard" or faking it, as I discuss in chapters 1 and 3 respectively. Thus, such performances are not unlike drag—a performance which for Butler exposes the degree to which gender is culturally scripted. The theatrical history of building manly ideals exposes them as cultural scripts rather than as an expression of an authentic (and ancient) form of the "way to be a man." Acts with an everyday negative inflection such as "posing" and "showing off" become powerful tools for thinking about our cultural scripts of masculinity. In the space between the role (the cultural script of masculinity) and its performance, is, of course, the actor, the one who makes choices and prepares, who "rehearses" his masculinity, whether he is playing Brick in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* or doing bicep curls. By investigating masculinities as theatrical acts, I illuminate men's choices in their performances of gender. The motivations and meanings that lie behind fit masculinities are multiple and varied, and by investigating these dynamic tensions between the masculine ideal and the performance of fitness, we can deconstruct hegemonic images and uncover their complex, entangled, and queer histories, opening space not only for these images to signify differently, but also to challenge the way they have become a

visual representation for the white, Western, bourgeois category of "Man," which as Sylvia Wynter argues, has itself through centuries of racial violence come to overrepresent itself as the universal category of humanity.[55]

Physical Culture Paradigms

As Conor Heffernan argues in his "State of the Field" article, the study of physical culture has enabled historians to "uncover broader societal trends relating to health, gender, class, race, sexuality, entrepreneurship and politics."[56] The study of physical culture is a nascent and interdisciplinary field. There is no scholarly organization or annual meeting for physical culture scholars; the Stark Center archive is the closest to an institutional home that the field has, but even this center is marginalized within the larger School of Kinesiology and Health Education on the Austin campus of the University of Texas. This institutional unmooring is a strength: it enables physical culture scholars to draw on various methods from their fields of study, including history, sociology, film and media studies, and literature. We might nonetheless identify two broad paradigms for the study of physical culture: one that emphasizes social, political, and ideological contexts, and another that focuses on the body.

Drawing together disparate strands of practice, such as Muscular Christianity[57] in England, and the *Turnen* (gymnastics) movement of Friedrich Jahn in Germany, physical culture responded to changing notions of the individual, the nation, and capital in the fin de siècle and early twentieth century.[58] Thus, historical studies of physical culture have tended to emphasize the muscular or disciplined body as an expression of grand narratives of modernity, nationalism, fascism, and socialism. Physical culture was highly malleable, and easily leveraged to serve various ideological or national aims. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Joan Tumblety, and Shannon L. Walsh demonstrate how physical culture performed national values, whether in colonial, occupied, or settler-colonial states (Britain, Vichy France, and the United States, respectively). Zweiniger-Bargielowska argues that physical culture was one part of a wider biopolitical web that included social reformers and the state.[59] She argues that "body management" emerged as a direct result of modernity itself, which produced an urbanized, mass consumer society that often detracted from the health and well-being of its citizens. The "problem" body meant that physical culture and education more generally could be instrumentalized by the state, particularly in times of war.[60] A similar biopolitical picture is sketched by Joan Tumblety in her study of physical education in Vichy France. Tumblety argues that the muscular male body represented "virility" and acted as a container to express anxieties over male failure, linked to a neo-Lamarckian and eugenicist philosophy of "improving the race."[61] A similar

analysis is found in Shannon Walsh's recent book, *Eugenics and Physical Culture Performance*, which "foregrounds eugenics as a key driving force that enabled the institutionalization of physical culture into education—whether formal or popular," in her examples for white American women.[62] The symbol of the built male body has also been instrumentalized by different ideological regimes. Nazi Germany, for example, made considerable use of the hard, upright, muscular phallic body as an ideal for the German people, as distinct from the soft, feminized body of the Other.[63] In this way, the vulnerabilities of the flesh were displaced onto others who denoted the limits of the "people"—Jews, queers, non-whites. Even more frequently, the phallic symbolic body under patriarchy is placed into binary opposition with the vulnerable *female* body.[64]

Such historical readings are complemented by work on fitness and physical culture in what might generally be called "critical sports studies," which understands the fit body as conditioned by consumer capitalism, or even as its greatest expression. The French social scientist and philosopher Jean-Marie Brohm argues that sports under capitalism reproduces capitalist labor structures and attendant values. Capitalist sports imagines the body as "a machine with a job of producing the maximum work and energy."[65] It does this because sports embodies ideological values, in this case, the ideology of the "competitive relationship."[66] Brian Pronger makes a similar claim in terms of exercise more specifically, arguing that "the widespread promotion of exercise and fitness reassert the cultural logic of fear and domination in the face of the profound failure of modernity to deliver on its promise of control."[67] The problem is not fitness per se, but the "technological view" of the body and fitness, which seeks to maximize the body's productive power.[68] Certainly, the global, neoliberal fitness industry, as an expression of consumer culture, is due for some critique. Fitness reproduces dominant, "ideal" images of the body, particularly with regard to women, but also men. Federico Boni and Susan M. Alexander's respective studies of the popular fitness magazine *Men's Health* both conclude that fitness has become a key means of reframing masculinity as a "consumer" product.[69] Jennifer Smith Maguire's *Fit for Consumption: Sociology and the Business of Fitness* defines fitness as a "field of negotiations, within which individuals contend with the competing, and often conflicting, demands made of them by consumer culture and the service economy."[70] Maguire suggests that "participation in the fitness field is bound up with producing subjectivities that are fit to consume, in that they locate the production of meaning, identity, and relationships with others in the processes of consumption."[71] Fitness reproduces an ideology of individual responsibility; it is an individual solution to a broad social problem.[72] Thus instrumentalized, fitness reproduces the problematic "class-based stratification of health and health risks" under capitalism.[73]

The body as an *agent* of these practices is curiously absent in much of this scholarly work, with some exceptions. Michael Anton Budd's *The Sculpture Machine* points out that physical culture provided grounds for resistance even when explicitly aligned with the interests of state or capital, because physical culture was above all a *participatory* practice. For example, the heteronormativity of physical culture's ideological framing was undercut by the fact that it also created "spaces in which male-male love could be legitimized if not always easily indulged."[74] Furthermore, while physical culture was a tool of empire and class warfare, "at the same time, the very plasticity of any bodily ideal created ruptures for workers and subaltern peoples."[75] "In this regard," Budd writes,

> the privileging of the individual body and its optimality, pleasure or satisfaction offered a space in which physical culture's collective national aims might be contravened in the pursuit of actual personal satisfaction and enjoyment, or anti-discipline if you will.[76]

Similarly, within a specific national context, Wilson Chacko Jacob suggests that physical culture was a space for *effendi* or middle-class Egyptian masculinity to be negotiated.[77] Some work in the sociology of sports affords greater space for embodied agency and multiple negotiations of the ideology of fitness in contemporary contexts. As Neville et al. argue: "fitness is something we negotiate, despite it being something we never really achieve."[78] Other research that considers the experience of fitness in spite of its ideological determinations includes Roberta Sassatelli's work, which emphasizes the participatory nature of fitness, Nick Crossley's gym-based auto-ethnographies, and Lee F. Monaghan's discussion of the phenomenology of "vibrant physicality" in bodybuilding.[79] These studies suggest that the experience of the body cannot be accounted for simply by cultural inscription and might even be resistant to it.

An important example of the built male body's ability to resist singular signification (and to signify differently) is its place in gay male visual and body culture.[80] The queer meaning of symbolic muscle does not simply reinforce the oppressive phallic binary, but complicates it, as Richard Mohr suggests. For example, the erotic art of Tom of Finland, which depicts hypermasculine, muscular bodies, features such an overabundance of masculine signifiers that they begin to "undermine each other."[81] "Far from endowing [the male body depicted] with privilege," Mohr writes, "his public hypermasculine posture exposes him to violence."[82] But the erotic nature of the muscular male body is not confined to gay visual culture but is interwoven in homosocial and explicitly homosexual practices in physical culture and fitness culture, from the exposure of the body for other fitness people in Instagram selfies to the practices of "hustling" and "muscle worship." Indeed, muscle worship (see chapter 1), which is a form

of sex work by male (and female) bodybuilders for (usually) male clients, is typically treated as pathological (for example, in Alan Klein's ethnography of southern California bodybuilding), since it directly contradicts the hypermasculine symbol of the body.[83] But this reading seems to flatten out the possibility that hustling might be a practice that emerges *from* the interweaving of the erotic in physical culture, and the contradictions of the phallic, symbolic body made flesh.[84]

David K. Johnson's book *Buying Gay* demonstrates the importance of physical culture to gay community formation in the twentieth century. He notes that mainstream academic LGBT+ history was often "openly hostile" to his object of study, since the ephemera of this consumer culture were considered less serious or noteworthy than narratives of political struggle and activism. However, Johnson suggests that not only were physique magazines *the* "primary gay media outlet in the nation" during the mid-twentieth century, they were for many gay men outside of America's coastal cities the first glimmer of queer life. One example of this was the future physical culture historian David Chapman, who committed the "transgressive" and empowering act of buying Bob Mizer's *Physique Pictorial* in his small hometown of Chula Vista, California, in 1959.[85] Johnson's research refutes the tendency to see physical culture's queer dimensions as a secret subtext: "What we now see as a culture of the closet hiding behind the he-man sport of weightlifting was at the time perceived as an expansive subculture threatening the sport. Interest in physical culture was not a ruse behind which gay men hid but a way for them to express their desires and find each other. Far from being in the closet, gay men's place in bodybuilding was part of public discourse."[86]

Johnson's study resonates with the experience of many minoritized practitioners and consumers of physical culture. Like David Chapman's first encounter with *Physique Pictorial* in 1959, I remember encountering muscle-building ads in the 1990s in the superhero comic books I loved (especially reprints of older issues of *Amazing Fantasy* and *X-Men* from the 1950s and '60s), which held the frisson of something illicit, even if their intentions were ambiguous. Superheroes themselves were a celebration of the male body. However, the gap in Johnson's research is the body itself and the slippery desire between "wanting" and "wanting to be." One fascinating footnote in Johnson's archive is an image from the papers of Glenn Carrington, a gay, Black American social worker who socialized with a group of other "weightlifting friends," all Black men themselves, who "attended bodybuilding contests, subscribed to physique magazines, and took pictures of one another in physique-inspired poses."[87] Johnson argues that this suggests "a sense of identification with the mostly white models" in the shows and magazines which Carrington consumed.[88] What Johnson does not explore—or perhaps cannot, due to his historical method—is the process by which Carrington and his friends developed

their physiques, reproduced in a photo in Johnson's book.[89] How might white- and straight-dominated physical culture as embodied practice, and not just as consumable images, have been a performance of minoritarian world-making for queer Black subjects like Carrington and his friends, rather than just identification with whiteness? The indeterminacy of the image of Carrington and his friends raises, for me, another problem (or opportunity) for the queer historiography of physical culture: the burden of proof for experiences and lives where "leaving too much of a trace has often meant that the queer subject has left herself open for attack."[90] While Johnson argues that physique magazines "were perceived as gay magazines by nearly everyone involved in their production or reception,"[91] this is not necessarily true of other earlier (and later) scenes in physical culture history that this book covers, such as Sandow's private exhibitions (chapter 1), Hackenschmidt's sponsorship by an older mentor (chapter 5), or the queer kinship of the original Muscle Beach (in the "Coda"). I propose that performance can provide another means of understanding these scenes, not through the detective work of interpretation but by lingering in spaces of indeterminacy. In my article "Epistemology of the Locker Room," I suggest that the liminal space of the locker room (between clothed and unclothed, private and public, heteronormative abuse and homosexual desire) "suggests the co-constitution of queer desire and normative heterosexuality, [and therefore] the epistemology of the locker room restores queer desire to the archive, not as its subtext, but as intention and possibility."[92] This is a conceptual shift that understands the intentions of historical actors (i.e., the nature of one's desire) to be never fully knowable, enabling us to reread absences and indeterminacies in the archive in a new way, not searching for proof, but possibility. I bring this scholarly orientation of "both/and" rather than "either/or" to an archive of the built cis, white, straight male body whose normative uses, as explained above, evidence a cultural binary where, to quote Sedgwick, "the ontologically valorized term ['heterosexual'] actually depends for its meaning on the simultaneous subsumption and exclusion of [the term 'homosexual']."[93]

Whether considered in its historical context, against economic structures, or as a symbol, it is impossible to separate the built male body from its fleshly and dynamic corporeality. But the body as an agent in its construction seems to present a problem for physical culture studies. It is here that I suggest that theater and performance studies—which have long wrestled with bodies—make an important intervention. Thus, this study is a sort of rereading, a re-performing of histories, archives, and practices that may appear familiar through the lens of theater and performance, in an attempt to shift our attention to the way in which bodily agents produce, work out, and make sense of their inscription and construction by broader social and historical forces.

Embodied Methods

The built male body is the intersection of materiality (what the body is), practice (what the body does), and significance (how the body is represented and interpreted). The nature of embodiment is therefore crucial to understanding how masculinities are constructed as well as deconstructed and queered in physical culture. The embodied experience of gestures, techniques, poses, and performances calls upon the subject's own agency in a dynamic process of learning and adapting. Ben Spatz theorizes *technique* as a form of embodied knowledge. Following vital work by Marcel Mauss, Michel Foucault, Nick Crossley, and others, Spatz argues that technique is how we come to know the world, and it develops dialectically with the changing world.[94] Technique is a dynamic thing, continually developing and changing, which "demands new mappings and understandings of the body."[95] Furthermore, technique exists dialectically with lived, material reality, which includes social, economic, political, and historical contexts. Spatz reminds us that body-knowledge is as much responsible for habits and everyday performances (of gender, for example) as cultural conditioning, and indeed, is potentially a site of resistance to cultural conditioning. In a similar way, Carrie Noland suggests that "kinaesthetic experience, produced by acts of embodied gesturing, places pressure on the conditioning a body receives, encouraging variations in performance that account for larger innovations in cultural practice that cannot otherwise be explained."[96] In other words, while physical training inscribes patterns of movement onto the body, it also enables the embodied subject to *reexperience* these patterns of movement. Noland concludes that perhaps "it is only through repetition, and not acquisition, that we gain the experience to separate momentarily from our social roles."[97] Discussing Judith Butler's concept of gender as an accumulation of performances, Noland asks: "what if the socially established meaning of the act were overwhelmed, at least momentarily, by the somatic experiences of pressure, friction, and pain? What if, in other words, the body spoke back?"[98]

This emphasis on the body's acquisition of technique is central to the arguments that *Muscle Works* makes. This means that my own embodied experience of physical culture—which opens this introduction—is also threaded throughout the book. In addition to my own experiences, I focus heavily on historical first-person descriptions of embodied experience, even while acknowledging and celebrating their partial and problematic nature as evidence. The experiential and phenomenological approach to research constitutes the intervention I believe theater and performance studies should make into the study of physical culture, but even in performance studies, such autobiographical, autoethnographic, and experiential writing is sometimes sidelined. For instance, in Walsh's study of American physical culture during the Progressive Era, she focuses on how mimetic

exercises (those that imitate "real" actions from daily life) can be read as what Joseph Roach calls acts of "surrogation" of a supposedly "lost" past, in which physical culturists appropriated "the daily physical actions of racially or economically disenfranchised groups, then perform[ed] those actions as effortless, therefore natural, aspects of an ideal white upper-class physical fitness practice, thus continually staging the actions of people depicted as part of an evolutionary past."[99] However, in the final pages of the book, Walsh describes her experience of doing a "farmer's carry" at a CrossFit: "The exercise produced a profound cognitive dissonance between my assumption about the muscular effort involved in something like carrying heavy loads back and farther, and the reality of that exercise's toll on my body."[100] This phenomenological insight opens "non-performative" and perhaps theatrical notions of excess, hyperbole, and failure, but perhaps it comes too late. Such embodied experiences challenge the biopolitical notion that physical culture naturalized certain gestures and ideals (in this case, of white supremacy), since they produce a kind of static and discomfort that are perhaps the grounds for change.

Intensive fieldwork for this project took place between 2016 and 2018, made possible by a fellowship from the AHRC. However, there is considerable bleed and overlap between my ethnographic "research" and the practice that forms a huge part of my life. The fieldwork ranges broadly in scale, both in terms of time and sample size. It considers my experiences learning to be a weightlifter, training with a coach and club in London, learning the unfamiliar form of bodybuilding from my friend Peter, and also my experiences "in residence" at an independent gym in Glasgow's regenerating Port Dundas region. I am careful not to present my experiences or those of my informants as "data" or "evidence." Although I conducted over fifteen formal interviews, I avoid, where possible, drawing on interviews to make a point, preferring instead to attend to bodily sensation, kinesthetic experience, and the process of learning technique. Indeed, more significant than the recorded interviews were the hours spent passing time *with* other people in gyms, sometimes without a word being said. The lateral relations of training *with* others, and the time spent in an activity, attend more to the physical or sensual, which has often been forgotten in the sociology of sport.[101]

Threaded through the book are sections of personal reflective writing that are at once autoethnography and memoir. The purpose of this alternative mode of writing is not, as in sociological studies, to present (or prioritize) empirical "evidence." Rather, the interwoven texts are intended to highlight forms of self-performative knowledge that have underpinned physical culture from its origins—whether it be the "Bodybuilder's Journey" (chapter 2), the strongman or wrestler's challenge to the audience (chapters 3 and 5), or the wellness and recovery memoir (chapter 4). Such performances of the self persist in the digital physical culture space today

in the social media posts of fitness influencers on Instagram and TikTok. These texts are drawn from my field notebooks over the past nine years, as well as my training diaries (at first handwritten, and now in the form of the TrainHeroic app), personal Instagram, and WhatsApp messages and voice notes to my coach.

Structure of the Chapters

This book is not structured chronologically but around a series of "logics": Hypertrophy, Transformation, Strength, Failure and Recovery, Grappling, and Mirror. The chapters are cross-temporal, putting examples across history into dialogue with each other, and with my practice and the practice of others in the field. The chapters represent new encounters with the archive, as techniques, poses, and performances are "worked out" in the present-day bodies. Finally, in the "Coda," I think through physical culture and fitness as an experiment with time that might produce the grounds for new relations—a form of queer kinship—to flourish. Through all of these chapters, I explore physical culture as a site for otherwise possibilities of acting in the world "as men," in relation to ourselves and others.

Chapter 1

✦

Hypertrophy

Men's Bodybuilding and Theatricality

2016. London, England

It's September and I'm meeting up with Peter Moore again today at a coffee shop in Shoreditch. Pete is an actor and bodybuilder from New Zealand I've known for a few years, when I first started Olympic weightlifting and used to go to a gym in Vauxhall that had good equipment. Pete was a personal trainer there. I wanted to talk to him about how he reconciles bodybuilding and theater. Much of our conversation centers on not wanting to fully identify with "muscle heads" or "meatheads" or other stereotypical images of bodybuilders.

B: *Do you think you get perceived in a certain way when you walk down the street?*

P: *Depends on how I'm feeling, right? I never like dressing in the training gear, looking like a bodybuilder because I try to disidentify with that, you know? So I cover up, wear stuff like this [plaid shirt, T-shirt, jeans].*

To illustrate a point he's making, Pete flexes his arms in double bicep, and it seems like way too much for the coffee shop we're sitting in. There's always something socially subversive about an excess of muscle. My arms aren't small, but they suddenly feel pretty small.

Peter is critical of what bodybuilding has turned into. For Pete, bodybuilding is, or should be, a way of connecting to the audience.

P: *You know the scene in* Pumping Iron *where Arnie is posing for the prisoners, and every time he hits a pose [hits a double bicep], they cheer? That's what it used to be like, right? Posing is supposed to be for other people, like it was a treat. But today, it's the opposite, not about giving something to their*

> *audience. It's like "look at me, look at me, look at what I've accomplished." It's different.*

Is it different, though? Isn't the point of bodybuilding to get people to look at your body? Otherwise, why build it?

The Overrepresentation of (Perfect) Man

Bodybuilders have long had a bad reputation, especially in recent years when gym culture has sometimes dangerously overlapped with the far right. In the United States, several far-right, white nationalist organizations operate gyms, using the language of physical culture to "transform members' bodies to embody masculine grit, promoting allegiance to a tight-knit 'tribe' of like-bodied white men."[1] The British far right has also spread fascist ideology via online fitness chat groups on the Telegram app[2]—in the same way the alt-right was nurtured by the internet subcultures of men's right's activism and "pick-up artistry"—often on bodybuilding sites like Bodybuilding.com's "Misc." forum and Reddit's "/r/bodybuilding" site. These boards feature comments that link bodybuilding to individualism, "freedom," and conservative values, particularly in relation to gender and race. As Brandon Edwards, an African American bodybuilder who used to post on Bodybuilding.com, says, "the racism was pretty phenomenal" although "some of the most hardcore posters there weren't all that interested in bodybuilding."[3]

The internet-driven philosophical movement called "neoreaction," or NRx, reportedly the theoretical fuel for white-nationalist, masculinist, populist far-right groups, often celebrates bodybuilding. The blogger Michael Periloux says that bodybuilding represents "a man developed to the fullest extent of his innate possibility," which echoes the proto-fascist editorials of the British physical culture journal *The Superman*, first published in 1930.[4] In issue 1, Dr. J. Warshaw's editorial "The Philosophy of the Superman" called for "improving the race": "For we are made for a life which is a contest, and must bear ourselves as those who mean to be conquerors."[5] Both writers—eighty-seven years apart—use the rhetoric of racial hygiene and eugenics.

These examples seem to confirm a long-held idea about bodybuilding: that its deployment in ideologies of authoritarianism, virility, individualism, and fascism is inherent to the practice itself. While there is an internet subculture of liberal-progressive lifters who post on social media about the "#swoleleft," bodybuilding is more associated in the popular imagination with the right wing. This association dates back to early twentieth-century Europe, when, according to J. A. Mangan, ideas of fascist virility were "legitimized by the adoption, projection and *adaptation* of the classical

nude, a gendered image symbolizing will, aggression, and power; historic and ahistoric masculine virtues."[6] These vague masculine values were then harnessed to a fascist vision of national "social utopianism" and self-sacrifice, a vision mediated by the new technologies of film and mechanical reproduction, as in Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia*.[7] Joan Tumblety shows how in interwar France, physical culturists such as Edmond Desbonnet and Marcel Rouet attempted to arrest the "decline" in French manliness. A 1941 book by Pierre Chevillet urges its readers to seek ideal health and fitness through a direct comparison with the proportions and aesthetic of classical statues.[8] Physical culture was made state practice in the *conseil de révision* (review board), a medical examination which sorted men into those "fit for service" and those who were not.[9] The *conseil de révision* was not the same as a physical examination—it had more in common with a bodybuilding competition: a pageant where naked men stood shivering under the gaze of experts. Bodybuilding exhibitions had long been a familiar part of popular performance culture by this time. Eugen Sandow's "Great Competition," held at the Royal Albert Hall in September 1901, brought men from across England to pose for and be measured by a panel of judges, including Sandow and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. In 1939 the town of Le Touquet-Paris-Plage, in northern France, featured the first pan-European bodybuilding competition, called "Le Plus Bel Athlète du Monde."[10] For Tumblety, in the *conseil de révision*, "citizenship was judged through conformity to the physique of normative masculinity and health . . . It gave tangible face to the conviction . . . that bodily virility and national vitality were one and the same."[11] For many Frenchmen of the period, failing *le conseil* was the primal scene that catalyzed their desire to take up a program of muscle-building.[12] A popular culture of visible muscularity was promoted via high rates of failure in a military ritual that had more in common with a beauty contest than an obstacle course.[13]

The entanglement of bodybuilding with statecraft suggests that the practice of bodybuilding is a performance of the normative ideal of what Sylvia Wynter analyzes as white, European, heteronormative "Man."[14] In her analysis of historical and present struggles with respect to race, gender, sexuality, and class, which Wynter gathers under the name of the "central ethnoclass Man vs. Human struggle," she suggests that this "'Western bourgeois' conception of the human . . . overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself."[15] From the initial colonial rupture, Wynter's research traces the genealogies of systems of classification that violate and dismember human beings, for the overrepresentation of Man "was to be only fully effected by the parallel invention/instituting of the new categories that were to serve as the physical referents of Man's Human Other."[16] The fifteenth- and sixteenth-century colonial, anti-Black and anti-Indigenous[17] system of classification established what she calls a "'descriptive statement" of the ostensibly only normal human, Man."[18] In the nineteenth

century this descriptive statement underwent a secular revision, in Darwinian terms, becoming a "purely biological being," which entailed repressing "all knowledge of the fact that its biocentric descriptive statement is a [narratively inscribed] descriptive statement."[19] In other words, in the nineteenth century, a colonial fiction was naturalized through an appeal to biology and evolution. These colonial systems of classification persist today in physical culture's appeals to a premodern classical ideal/myth of Hellenic perfection and the eugenic discourse of the elimination of weakness, performed through bodybuilding, which literally measures and evaluates bodies based on a scoring system of muscle mass, definition, and symmetry and balance.[20] If, following Dyer, Mangan, and others mentioned earlier, physical culture performance and bodybuilding are a normative performance of "Man's" body, then, as Wynter suggests, a parallel physical referent is required, which we find in performances such as anthropological displays and "human zoos," as well as public performances of the autopsy of "enfreaked" bodies by sideshow proprietors, which developed contemporaneously with the physical culture movement.[21]

The colonial descriptive statement of Man and the "anthropological" display of his "Other" is seen in the writings of the French physical culturist and educationalist Georges Hébert. In the 1930s, Hébert used photographs of muscular Senegalese men to evidence the colonial fantasy that Black men were "naturally" gifted with athletic and muscular physiques.[22] Elsewhere, Hébert's writing draws on tropes we would read as outwardly racist today,[23] although this colonial-biocentric ideology persists today in sports and physical culture through the myth of Black athletic superiority[24] or the discourse of "good genetics" in bodybuilding.[25] However, as Douglas Brown points out, there was no "natural," biological, or evolutionary advantage in the muscularity of the Senegalese men in Hébert's photographs. They had all engaged in purposeful physical training (specifically wrestling), a fact Hébert ignores.[26]

The active violence of whiteness in the historical context of bodybuilding raises questions about the possibility of a reparative reading of the practice. Yet, it is also true that bodybuilding has been a refuge for Black, Indigenous, and people of the Global Majority across the world, both historically and in the present. As Richard Dyer notes, while the white male body is overrepresented as a symbol of bodybuilding, bodybuilding as an activity and industry is more racially equal than its popular perception will admit.[27] The South African historian Francois Johannes Cleophas adds to this public understanding by creating "decolonized" physical culture narratives through his work on the contributions of Black weightlifters and bodybuilders to South African physical culture. His research in the private archives of Roland Eland, for instance, challenges the state narratives of South African sports and demonstrates how Eland resisted the racism of a segregated system of physical culture by adapting his training methods.

Moreover, Cleophas's study of the bodybuilder David Isaacs shows how Isaacs used bodybuilding for Black community formation, today operating a gym based on the principle of "creativity and the courage to be original."[28] Historically, Michael Anton Budd notes, while physical culture was a tool of empire and coloniality, "at the same time, the very plasticity of any bodily ideal created ruptures for workers and subaltern peoples."[29]

In this chapter, I suggest that something else inherent to the practice makes ruptures in the coloniality of bodybuilding possible: *theatricality*. Subversions of masculinist, white, nationalist, colonial, and fascist uses of bodybuilding are possible as a result of the inherent contradictions *in* bodybuilding, such as the tension between its aesthetic performance and "objective" evaluation, the fact that it is a model of both a normative ideal and a "freaky" extreme, and most importantly, the fact that it communicates a high-art "classical" ideal in the low art of theater, which is shabby and material and laborious. While physical culturists like Eugen Sandow drew on classical sculpture as inspiration for their stage acts, they performed in the commercial frame of the music hall. Indeed, part of the appeal of such performances was the *failure* of the illusion; the encounter with the human disguised as symbol. What Nick Ridout calls the "space between representation and its failure" in the theater, I suggest, opens the possibility for these other meanings of pleasure, titillation, self-making, and so on, potentially diffusing the power of the built body as symbol.[30] The theatricality of the built body challenges the heteronormative masculine standards for which this body is often an avatar; or, at least it reveals them to be far more fragile, fluid, and mutable than they first appear.

In this chapter, I return to the historical "origin" of bodybuilding, to the body who has the greatest claim to stand as the symbol of Wynter's "Man"—Eugen Sandow, who throughout his career was often called the "Perfect Man" (see fig. 1). What I demonstrate is that reading his performances both on and offstage through the lens of theatricality, as well as its corollary, anti-theatricality (the historical suspicion and hatred of theater), tells us a lot about what it is that is disturbing and irritating about the built male body, as well as what is potentially reparative about its building. First, I argue that bodybuilding troubles ideas of *labor*, specifically the distinction between productive and unproductive labor; and secondly, that it troubles relations of *property*, the distribution of resources as well as what is appropriate or proper.[31] But it is precisely from this troubling stance of superfluity and unproductivity that the seductive nature of the hypertrophic muscle, like the theater, can "queer" its association with normative masculinity. From Sandow, I go on to explore the theatricality of bodybuilding in other examples: a 1988 posing routine by bodybuilder Bob Paris, and a failed musical theater adaptation of Samuel Fussell's memoir, *Muscle*, before returning to Sandow to think through his "private exhibitions," the "low" art of popular theater, and the association

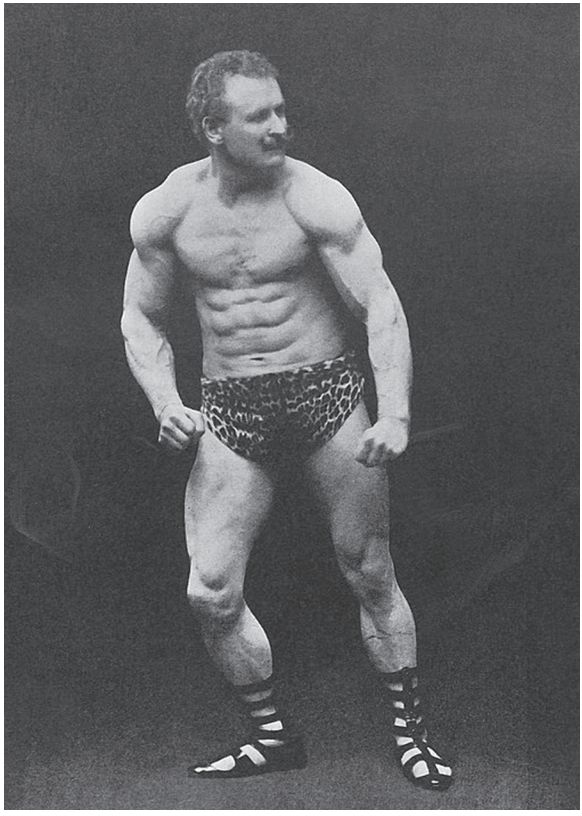

Fig. 1. "A New Sandow Pose, VII," before July 1902. From *Sandow's Magazine of Physical Culture.* Photograph by D. Bernard & Co, Melbourne. Wikimedia Commons.

between bodybuilding and sex work. Finally, I reflect on the presence of the muscular body in dramatic (fictional) stage performance, before reflecting on the theatricality of bodybuilding training, away from the competition stage.

Sandow's Theatricality

Although Eugen Sandow was hardly the strongest or fittest physical culturist, he was the first to combine above-average physical strength with exceptional muscular development. "People had been conditioned to thickset, music hall strongmen," writes Chapman, "huge mountains of flesh and sinew."[32] Sandow's resemblance to the proportions of classical statuary was a crucial aspect of the invention of modern bodybuilding:

training for aesthetics as well as function. Born in Königsberg, Prussia (now Kaliningrad) as Friedrich Wilhelm Müller, Sandow performed as a circus athlete (feats of strength and wrestling) across Europe before finding fame in London, and then in the United States. His debut at New York's Casino Theatre in 1893 in the "burlesque musical" *Adonis* demonstrates how dependent his popularity was upon visual spectacle. *Adonis* was the star vehicle for Henry E. Dixey, a handsome vaudeville comedian of the period.[33] The plot tells the story of a female sculptor who is commissioned by a duchess and her daughters to produce a statue of a knight. After the sculptor falls in love with her creation and refuses to give it to the duchess, the statue is brought to life so that he can decide who to live with.[34] This living Adonis was played by Dixey. In the show's finale, Adonis, fed up with being objectified, chooses to become a statue once again, climbing on his pedestal as the curtain falls.[35] However, one evening in 1893, the audience was treated to some extra stage magic, as the curtain rose again to reveal Eugene Sandow in the same pose that Dixey had occupied.

Sandow was not technically "playing a role" in *Adonis*. His performance was a bit of extra titillation, an extra pleasure for the audience. In terms of the narrative, Sandow's posed, built body superseded, or more accurately, *supplemented* Dixey's portrayal of "ideal masculinity." Because Adonis (the role) is staged as the "complete" and ideal man, Sandow's appearance seems frivolous or excessive, an unnecessary treat for the audience. As Jacques Derrida argues, however, "what is necessary—what is lacking—also presents itself as a surplus, an overabundance of value, a frivolous futility that would have to be subtracted, although it makes all commerce possible."[36] In other words, the posed excess of Sandow's muscles *supplements* a lack in the construction of "masculinity," even though as excess, his muscles appear as unnecessary, as surfeit. This *supplementary* logic aligns with a specific form of *theatricality* that goes beyond simply performing "in the theater." Sandow's direct, presentational appearance at the finale is not part of the dramatic fiction, but rather engages the spectator as a complicit partner in consuming his act.

By June 1893, Sandow's act was no longer a surprise addition to *Adonis* but was publicized separately—in other words, spectators were coming to consume Sandow's act (which, in addition to posing, contained strongman feats such as juggling dumbbells and the Tomb of Hercules).[37] Later that year, Sandow became the headline act of Florenz Ziegfeld's Trocadero theater. Dispensing with any pretense of dramatic illusion, Ziegfeld's vaudeville show presented a series of acts that included gymnastic feats, singers, and musicians. Here, Sandow was billed as the "Strongest Athlete on Earth."[38] These spectacles represented an ideological separation that divides physical culture into, on the one hand, practices of weightlifting, strongman, and wrestling that rely on objective, measurable competition

(although as I will go on to discuss, these practices also depend on theatrical labor), and on the other hand, bodybuilding, the aesthetic development of the body. When a body develops muscle for its own sake, it is looked on with suspicion. David Webster writes that physical culture literature of the nineteenth century "showed a great admiration for strong, well-built men, but a resistance to systems which were purely muscle building and not strength gaining."[39] This led to the separation of weightlifting and bodybuilding as sports in the mid-twentieth century. While in early bodybuilding competitions, athletes were required to demonstrate strength as well as pose for the evaluation of their muscular development, by the late 1960s, as John D. Fair shows, the two had become separate: "While [Bob] Hoffman and the AAU [Amateur Athletic Union], as inheritors of the Greek tradition, viewed musculature as an outward manifestation of other desirable qualities, including health, character, beauty and athleticism, the Weider camp [followers of the Weiders, bodybuilding magnates from Montreal] placed more emphasis on muscles or appearance for its own sake."[40] Bodybuilding contests increasingly resembled their music-hall forebears. One show in 1956 also featured "thirty-two groups of marchers; and many acrobatic, balance, lifting, and clown acts interspersed with the physique competition."[41] The Olympic athlete and bodybuilder Peary Rader called this contest "one of the finest physique and variety shows we have ever seen," although "no one knew what [they] were judging."[42] Dimitris Liokaftos calls this "middle period" of bodybuilding, from 1940 to 1970, a shift of paradigm to "muscle for muscle's sake," which would continue apace into the contemporary paradigm of excessive and highly theatrical "freaky" bodies (1980s to the present).[43]

Muscle for muscle's sake, like the theater, troubles concepts of use value and productive labor. Just as theater has been historically policed because it is supposedly frivolous or unnecessary, from the early days of physical culture it has been known that excessive muscular development does not necessarily signify strength. A 1902 article called "The Art of Weightlifting" in Sandow's own magazine acknowledges the work of theatrical muscle: abnormal development, the unknown author writes, "is far more instrumental in arousing the wonder and admiration of the spectators than actually useful in raising the weights."[44] The ideal body that represents a paradigm of strength, health, and fitness is therefore always-already accompanied by a kind of theatrical shadow, which, when acknowledged, disrupt the possibility of objective judgment.

Despite this, many attempted to objectively measure Sandow's claims to being the "Perfect Man" or the "Strongest Man on Earth." In 1893, Dr. Dudley Allen Sargent, a physical educator and crucially, a "onetime circus acrobat," conducted a physical examination of Sandow. First, Sargent took Sandow's measurements, including muscle size, height, and weight. This was followed by tests "measuring both his reaction time and his

strength."[45] This examination had the veneer of objective science, but it was pure theater. As John F. Kasson describes it,

> The strongman knelt down behind the physician and had him step with one foot onto Sandow's open palm. Then with his arm straight Sandow lifted the surprised Sargent up and placed him on a table. He performed other feats of strength with Sargent, including one that might have been billed "The Human Trampoline." Sandow lay on the floor and asked Sargent to stand on his abdomen. With the doctor in place, Sandow kept his abdominal muscles relaxed for a moment, then suddenly contracted them, popping Sargent into the air. Sandow concluded by making the muscles on his arms and legs dance as Sargent marveled at his control.[46]

This overtly theatrical display queered the supposedly objective apparatus of the medical examination. Doctors are not meant to be entertained and astonished by feats and tricks. But rather than Sandow "duping" Sargent through a private performance of strength, skill, and erotic desire (the same qualities Sandow employed in his stage work), I prefer to read the doctor's role as one of active collusion, in the manner of a magician's assistant, lending both an air of learned skill and a sense of naiveté to the "examination." After all, the science that Sargent engaged in, "anthropometry," as Carolyn de la Peña points out, "could be used to prove whatever its researcher set out to find."[47] For example, anthropometry was used to "prove" a racial basis for inequality, using cranial size differences to measure intelligence between races. The combination of visual aesthetics (Sandow's size and symmetry) and impressive feats led Sargent to declare Sandow the "Perfect Man," conveniently obscuring the total lack of scientific method in this evaluation. Sargent declared: "Sandow is the most wonderful specimen of man I have ever seen. He is strong, active, and graceful, combining the characteristics of Apollo, Hercules, and the ideal athlete. There is not the slightest evidence of sham about him. On the contrary, he is just what he pretends to be."[48]

Prior to Sandow, Kasson notes, Sargent had studied another representative of nineteenth-century manliness, the boxer and actor John L. Sullivan.[49] However, "no one could mistake Sullivan for a classical nude [unlike Sandow]; he is merely a man undressed."[50] The problem was that Sullivan's profession, his *work* as a boxer, was too evident in his body; Sargent "believed that concentration on a single activity or sport created a physical imbalance and, with it, a potential moral distortion."[51] Sargent proposed a seductive idea of built masculinity as *unmarked*, with "no mark of specific endeavor or work" (a trope I challenge in chapter 5).[52] Sandow is made the natural, ideal man (or Man), what every man should strive for by returning to a more harmonious physical relation with the

world symbolized by the distant past. Simultaneously, Sargent positions Sandow's physical training (a labor) as precisely "not-labor," that is, as *leisure*. In this way, what is implicit in Kasson's analysis of this scene is the trope of the "manly amateur" sportsman, one who had sufficient time away from wage labor to devote to sport, and one whose body bore no marks of specialization—a growing concern, given the increasing implementation of Taylorist scientific management.[53]

Sandow's theatricality was also demonstrated in the English legal system. In 1898, at the Grand Palace in Sheffield, the Saxon Trio announced that Arthur "Saxon" Henning would "lift a barbell that even the great Sandow could not raise."[54] After Saxon completed the "bent press" lift of 264 pounds (120 kg), Sandow rose from the crowd to challenge Saxon and maintain his reputation. Unfortunately, Sandow could not lift the barbell, and the Saxons began publicizing Arthur as "the Man That Defeated Sandow."[55] In 1901, Arno Saxon was unceremoniously pushed from the trio he had founded. He wrote to Sandow, and as revenge for his firing, agreed to testify for Sandow that the barbell had been filled with mercury that night (as opposed to lead shot), making it impossible for Sandow to keep it level. Arthur Saxon had many months of practice with the rigged barbell, Arno claimed. Sandow sued Arthur Saxon for libel, and a special jury was arranged in Birmingham. According to David Chapman:

> When it came time for him to testify, Sandow jumped up in the middle of the courtroom, tore off his shirt, and revealed his muscular physique. Next, an assistant brought a barbell into court. Then, while Sandow's lawyer explained that this was exactly as Sandow had lifted Saxon's bell, the blond Hercules stood the bell on end, rocked it to his shoulder, tilted it, swung it around, and pressed it to arm's length.[56]

Jurors are not meant to be astonished by pecs and abs. Sandow won the case, but it was not through an objective and fair application of the law. Arno Saxon's story of mercury was probably false, concocted to humiliate his former colleagues. And as Chapman notes, Sandow's courtroom lift was far from the proper form of the bent-press performed by Saxon. Rather, the judge and jury were wowed by "a little show business glitter."[57] Arthur Saxon *was* stronger than Eugen Sandow. But Sandow *performed* strength more effectively than Saxon.

Medical and scientific fascination with Sandow's body persisted through the twentieth century and was preserved in several artifacts, including Thomas Edison's 1894 film reel "Sandow, the Modern Hercules,"[58] now archived by the Library of Congress in Washington, DC; and a plaster cast of Sandow's nude body, made by the British Museum curator Ray Lankester and now in storage at London's Natural History Museum.[59]

Lankester declared that the cast "presents a perfect type of a European man," and displayed it under the name "Homo Europiensis."[60] Clearly, Lankester's project was one of scientific racism, aligning with eugenic discourses of physical culture of the period, and he planned to create a series of casts of "perfect" specimens of other races, though the project was never completed.[61] However, as I have demonstrated, not only did such demonstrations of Sandow's "perfection" have no basis in scientific reality (just as race itself is a social construct), but they relied on being staged in a theatrical way, a theatricality that just as quickly was forgotten.

2017. London, England

It's May, and I'm in my usual gym. After training, I walk into the men's locker room, and there's this average-looking white guy with glasses in his mid-thirties or early forties there. It's a real Ned Flanders effect—from the neck downwards he's built like a classic physique bodybuilder, a Steve Reeves type, V-shaped, strong shoulders, defined abs. He's flexing in the mirror. A little while ago, I might have found this objectionable. I might have made some unkind comment in my head and maybe even scoffed as I walked by. I remember once coming out of Bethnal Green tube, and there's this hipster guy in front of me on the escalator looking in disgust and just openly laughing at these two huge bodybuilders, who were, to be fair, ridiculously massive. They'd obviously come from MuscleWorks gym. But how is shaming their bodies any different than other forms of body shaming? Last night at L.'s party, her brother's girlfriend was talking about a university friend who has "really gotten into weightlifting" (bodybuilding, she meant). "He looks terrible now," and everyone laughed, like they agreed. I wonder a lot about that laugh. What does it mean to police the way people take up space, be too "extra," or think about their bodies, as if we all aren't thinking about our bodies all the time?

Victor Turner defines theater as a "hypertrophy"; that is, "an exaggeration of jural and ritual processes."[62] Roland Barthes also refers to hypertrophy in his discussion of theatrical costume. For Barthes, costume has multiple functions, and each must be in service of the theatrical sign-system as a whole. If, he writes, "one of those services is exaggeratedly developed, if the servant becomes more important than the master, then the costume is sick, it suffers from *hypertrophy*."[63] Here, hypertrophy again signifies exaggeration and enlargement, but also disease. Hypertrophy is a nineteenth-century word meaning (according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*) "enlargement of an organ or tissue resulting from an increase in the size of its cells."[64] It is also the goal of bodybuilding: muscle growth brought on by (usually) 8–12 repetitions of each exercise that will stimulate the body into putting on size when combined with an increase in food.

The use of this term in Turner and Barthes's writings signals two commonly held and related assumptions about the theater. First, that theater is exaggerated, showy, ostentatious, or affected, in other words, *theatrical*. Theater is the enlarged cell among other cells, the pumped triceps against the rest of the arm, the bodybuilder among other people. Second, and more negatively, theater is a corrupted or corrupting force, synonymous with disease, decay, and decadence. Theater is Steve Michalik's liver.[65]

Exaggerated muscle has been viewed with irritation, annoyance, or outright disgust since the early days of physical culture, as shown by a letter to the *Times of India,* reprinted as "The Sandow Fiend" in *Sandow's Magazine* in 1901. Written by an anonymous writer calling him or herself "Adiposum Dolorosum," the letter laments those amateur followers of Sandow "whose zeal is only equaled by their verbosity."[66]

> Doubtless Mr. Sandow is a very estimable gentleman, and an excellent specimen of the state of knobbiness which it is possible to get the human form to assume with care and a strict attention to business. Were his disciples in the art of muscular development content to keep their state of bumpiness to themselves, all would be well. But alas! This is not the case. . . . We all know the muscular fiend, who comes up to you, drawing his very elastic double-breasted flannel coat across his corporation, and, with an air of smirking content, informs you that he has had it taken in twice already. He makes insulting remarks about your waist, asks you to feel his deltoid, his trapezius, his biceps, the muscles of his calf. I have even heard of one enthusiast who was constantly referring in the most indelicate manner to his glutens [*sic*] maximus. He then tells you the various measurements of his arms, forearm, thigh, calf, and approaching you with an air of mystery, suddenly bellows into your ear "Sandow."[67]

The letter-writer's description unites various forms of anti-bodybuilding prejudice. The Sandow Fiend is pretentious, affected, putting on an air of superiority through his ostentatious display; and at the same time, he is provocatively corporeal. This combination of fleshly corporeality and airy pretense also defines theater in general, especially for the philosophical tradition known as anti-theatricalism.

Jonas Barish's extensive study of "the antitheatrical prejudice" suggests that throughout Western history there has been sustained hostility to theatricality on two grounds: mimicry; and ostentation, or exaggeration, exhibitionism, ornamentation.[68] Both are at work in the anti-theatrical prejudice against bodybuilding. According to Barish, mimicry, "the power to become, or to pretend to become, what one is not—must be reckoned the more fundamental of the two, and the first thing to say about it is that

it arouses, and has always aroused, a nearly universal distrust."[69] This distrust can be traced back to Plato, who hated theater because it presented a false image of reality. Poets (and the theater), he believed, could not convey truth, because they traded in representation or mimesis. By the early modern period, when professional theater flourished, anti-theatrical pamphlets by Puritan writers suggested that "the theatre stood for pleasure, for idleness, for the rejection of hard work and thrift as the roads to salvation."[70] At a time of plagues, theater itself was figured as a plague, where actors were seen as "vectors of a contagion of corruptive role-playing."[71] This was driven by gendered anxiety. In Italy, where women were permitted to act in the commedia dell'arte, appearing in the theater as an actress "represents an intensification of female evil because she puts her body on display for others to see."[72] The Catholic pamphleteer Cesare Franciotti (1611) suggested that the actress "adorns herself with the 'trimmings of [a] whore' " and speaks words so "full of internal flame" that "even the wisest men" are led into temptation," cementing the historical connection between the theater and sex work. However, in England, where women were not allowed on stage and boys took female roles, anti-theatricality, according to Laura Levine, encompassed "a full-fledged fear of dissolution, expressed in virtually biological terms, that costume [could] structurally transform men into women."[73] This, then, raised fears of homosexuality, or to use the word prevalent at the time, sodomy.[74] By the eighteenth century, novelists began to position the improper, public exhibitionism of the theater against the proper, private domestic sphere, again, especially for women.[75] This carried over into the nineteenth century, where popular literature demonstrates that the idea of "play-acting" in everyday life (like Becky Sharp, the anti-heroine of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*) had strong negative connotations.[76]

A large part of anti-theatricalism is a "revulsion of actors."[77] For Martin Puchner, anti-theatricalism stems from theater's "uneasy position between the performing and the mimetic arts."[78] Puchner writes: "as a performing art like music or ballet, the theatre depends on the artistry of live human performers on stage. As a mimetic art like painting or cinema, however, it must utilize these human performers as signifying material in the service of a mimetic project."[79] This constitutive human element engenders a suspicion of theater as "showy, deceptive, exaggerated, artificial, or affected."[80] As a result of anti-theatricalism, physical culture has washed its hands of bodybuilding's tawdry origins in the commercial and popular theater from the very beginning. As Tumblety points out, in France "ambivalence to the potentially narcissistic and theatrical display of body-building muscle [could] be found across the board. All sides preferred an athletic man of action who may have developed his physical core through systematic exercise, but who proved his worth through sporting struggle in the stadium and in the streets."[81] In addition to gender normativity, anti-theatricalism

also rehearsed concerns about capitalism. David Hawkes suggests that in the early modern period, "the rise of a consumer culture, the growth in the power of money, the exaltation of the mercantile classes, and the new social mobility combined to produce a crisis in traditional understandings of hierarchy and order" which was exemplified by acting, which threatened the notion of a stable identity.[82]

The relation between stage and spectator was at the heart of the art critic Michael Fried's version of anti-theatricalism. He argued that theatricality results when "dramatic illusion [is] vitiated in the attempt to impress the beholder and solicit his applause," in other words, when the spectator is acknowledged.[83] Fried critiqued minimalism, or in his words, literalism, a "sensibility or mode of being" that has taken hold in modern art, and which has been "corrupted or perverted by theatre."[84] Writing in 1967, Fried mused upon how minimalist sculptures, such as the furniture-like architectural forms of Donald Judd, are taken by the beholder *for what they are*. This condition of art is "theatrical" because "it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters literalist work."[85] Literalist sculpture moves the spectator away from the possibility of "absorption," the idea "that the beholder did not exist, that he was not really there, standing before the canvas."[86] The size and presence of literalist art instead create an encounter that includes the *body* of the spectator and "extorts" her complicity.[87]

This condition of spectatorship amounted to a cheapening and deadening of the neutral artwork. Fried was quite forceful on this point: "*theatre is now the negation of art.*"[88] What might Fried's thinking on sculpture, when aligned to earlier anti-theatrical ideas about gender and capitalism, tell us about male bodybuilding, a liminal practice between sport and art that has long had an uneasy relation with the fine arts? What happens when the bodybuilder-performer makes himself the object of the spectator's contemplation—but also looks back at the spectator? I suggest that this hypothetical moment contains an embodied critique of relations of labor, value, and desire. First, it is a process of active self-objectification by an embodied subject ("I make myself an aesthetic object; an artwork"). But the aesthetic gaze is soon negated by the acknowledgment of the spectator (the object says "look at me"). In this moment of complicit spectatorship, the bodybuilder and spectator acknowledge a relation of production and consumption.

We can consider these relations through an analysis of Bob Paris's free-posing routine at the 1988 Mr. Olympia competition, the most important bodybuilding event in the world, in Los Angeles.[89] The routine is celebrated as a classic piece of bodybuilding choreography.[90] Paris is known as the world's first openly gay bodybuilder, and his physique, then and now, is celebrated as what Fair calls an "Apollonian" (vs. "Herculean") archetype.[91] Paris begins his routine by kneeling, with his arms crossed in

Fig. 2. "Baby Can I Hold You?" Free-posing routine by Bob Paris, Mr. Olympia 1988. Screenshot by the author.

front of his chest. It is a passive, relaxed pose, although the striations in his pectoral muscles and deltoids demonstrate the tension in his body. As the first lines of Tracy Chapman's song "Baby Can I Hold You?" begin, he raises himself up, smoothly, onto one knee, before turning his gaze to the sky and extending his right arm (see fig. 2). He sweeps his left arm behind his head in a gesture that turns into an archer pose, before flexing both arms in a kneeling front double biceps. The sequence of gestures embodies the tension between what we might call artistic "representation" and entertaining "presentation," with the classical shifting effortlessly into the crowd-pleasing. The routine is filled with unusual, emotive poses: Paris wraps his arms around his body in a gesture of grief; he covers his eyes and reaches blindly for another, like Orpheus. The routine ends with a full ten seconds of him lying on the floor in a pose whose folded leg shows off his hamstrings and calves, but which also resembles the ancient Roman sculpture called *The Sleeping Hermaphrodite*.[92]

However, the conditions of bodybuilding's production and reception demand that the posing routine also be crowd-pleasing. This is first demonstrated by Paris's gaze. For much of the routine, his gaze is directed away from the audience, looking down at the floor, or up to the sky, or covered entirely by his hands. But at several points he turns his gaze to the

audience and hits a pose that elicits even more intense applause from the audience. These moments are theatrical because they—like Fried's literalist sculpture—confront the viewer with Paris as a present, embodied subject. They defy the possibility of *absorption*, and demand our attention—and indeed, our affirmation. Paris's status as a theatrical sign shifts from representation (of an archer, a tormented lover, archetypes that themselves index other themes and emotions) to presentation. Secondly, the "flex," or the contraction of muscles in order to best show off their development, erases what might be called an "anti-theatrical approach to theatricality" in performance, in other words, a "naturalistic performance style." The eighteenth-century actor David Garrick was celebrated for his naturalism, and his ability to behave as if there were no audience beyond the invisible fourth wall.[93] The flex of the bodybuilder posing is the very opposite of Garrick's unaffected, free, and therefore supposedly "authentic" movement.[94]

This shift from representation to presentation is partly why male bodybuilding, despite being a sport of aesthetics, seems resistant to traditional aesthetic judgment. As Niall Richardson notes, contemporary bodybuilding has developed its own aesthetic vocabulary centering on the "freak."[95] Rarely do we hear bodybuilding described as "beautiful." Instead, it is typically described by those outside the culture most generously as "over-the-top" or "too much." I suggest that this kind of uncertain adjective (too much of *what*?), so often also used to describe tacky or gaudy theatrical spectacles, marks a discomfort with the economic implications of bodybuilding—the clear indication that the bodybuilder is laboring for our (the audience's) scopophilic pleasure. This discomfort acknowledges both the inverted gendered dimensions of our viewing, including the (homo)erotic nature of the gaze, and the labor relations of bodybuilding. Therefore, I argue that the inherent theatricality of bodybuilding threatens the mutable political symbols of its use by provoking a kind of spectatorial discomfort—an awareness of our watching. Like Brecht's *verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect), this discomfort prompts contemplation of our place in a network of relations—of gender, race, desire, and labor.

When Paris hits a front double-biceps pose and smiles at the audience, it seems clearly calculated to grab our attention. These poses, like the bodybuilder's physique generally, seem like a "gimmick," which the cultural theorist Sianne Ngai argues is a "specifically capitalist aesthetic phenomenon."[96] Gimmicks annoy, irritate, and disturb, she argues, because they are a labor-saving device, easily grabbing our attention through novelty or trickery, but also because they seem to be working too hard. Ngai notes that the first uses of the word "gimmick" appeared in the 1920s at a time when many labor-saving devices in capitalist industry had intensified economic productivity while they alienated impoverished workers. Aesthetic gimmicks "translat[ed] . . . the reduction of human labor through

progressively advanced machines and techniques of production, into a sign of impoverishment in the aesthetic realm."[97] The bodybuilder's physique seems most theatrical when it seems to demand the viewer's attention. Bodybuilding irritates because the extremity of a bodybuilder's condition seems to eschew intellectual or aesthetic labor to catch our attention. At the same time, the bodybuilder also appears to be working *too hard* for our attention, embodying the possibility of a regime of labor that is entirely of the self, a kind of over-identification with the capitalist ideology of self-making that ironically turns into unproductive labor. An encounter with labor relations in muscle is also an encounter with ideas of *property.* First, the gaze appropriates, or takes possession of the body for the viewer. However, by acknowledging the presence of the spectator, the male bodybuilder threatens what is considered *proper*, because he demonstrates (1) his agency in turning himself into an object for the other's gaze; and (2) the audience's complicity, its consumption and desire, in this relation of exchange. In other words, the gaze of the bodybuilder meeting the gaze of the audience says: "I work for you." Thus, by reading through the theater, the practice of male bodybuilding in certain contexts might be said to queer dominant conceptions of masculinity and gender roles, not by presenting (as has been argued by others)[98] the "freaky" body, but by disrupting a relation of value.

However, there is one more aspect of (anti-)theatricality that we can analyze in Paris's posing routine: the intention of the bodybuilder as artist. The year after this performance, Paris officially came out as gay in the July 1989 issue of *Iron Man Magazine*. His Mr. Olympia routine was performed in the midst of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s. Watching it on video today, one is struck not merely by Paris's muscular development, but by the unusually elegiac quality of the choreography. While Paris's built body communicates a hegemonic ideal of gay masculinity that in some ways was a response to the crisis,[99] his choreography, filled with images of blindly seeking care and comfort, embodies a narrative of regret, loss, and grief. Despite his celebrated physique, Paris only took tenth place at the 1988 Mr. Olympia competition. Perhaps his routine's artistic intent, its potential challenge of the hegemonic hard body through soft and fluid vulnerability, raised the anti-theatrical specter of theater's queerness. We might argue that Paris's routine was his attempt—within the theatrical apparatus of competition—to make his body signify differently, and perhaps to disrupt the normative regime of gender signification of which he, as a queer athlete, was clearly aware. Later, Paris would discuss the queer panic of bodybuilding in his autobiography, *Gorilla Suit*: "The myth that all bodybuilders were gay caused great psychic unrest among the straight men who ran the sport, great strivings to prove what a wholesome heterosexual pastime it was."[100] Perhaps what is discomfiting about Paris's theatrical gaze in this particular routine is not only an acknowledgment of

a relation of labor, but an acknowledgment of his own desire as well as the desire of the viewer—what Benjamin Weil calls the "unclear and unstable" line "between wanting to be or wanting to fuck someone."[101] The gaze of "one man hoping to possess the physique of another man in some capacity," as Weil states, is not the "exclusive preoccupation of queer men" but rather "a universal phenomenon."[102] And, as we will see in the next section as we return to Eugen Sandow, it is a phenomenon that dates back to the earliest days of bodybuilding.

Property and Propriety: Eugen Sandow's Private Exhibitions

In 1894, Eugen Sandow embarked on a seven-and-a-half-month tour of the United States under the management of the theater impresario Florenz Ziegfeld. It was during this tour that he began giving "private exhibitions." These would take place in the theater's green room, after the curtain had fallen. After bathing, Sandow would don "a pair of scanty briefs" and greet audience members in another room in the theater.[103] Customers would hand over the staggering fee of $300 (which in 2018 would be worth over $10,000) for the privilege of being in this private audience.[104] A journalist at the time reported that Sandow told his audience of men and women: "I want you to feel how hard these muscles are. . . . As I step before you, I want each of you to pass the palm of your hand across my chest."[105] Contemporary reports from men and women were full of breathless fascination: "I was thrilled to the spine," one woman said.[106]

These exhibitions are treated as minor curiosities in Sandow's biography, but they are striking because they seem to confirm the (homo)eroticism which the bodybuilding industry of the 1980s wished to cover up, and tell us something quite important about bodybuilding as performative and theatrical labor, as well as how eroticism and economics intersect. Chapman tells us that the exhibitions were invented by Ziegfeld and Sandow to "tap the inner *urgings* of the people who witnessed their performances and to turn it to profit."[107] Sandow's American tour took place thirteen years prior to the first *Ziegfeld Follies* revue, known for its "glorification" of the chorus girl. However, as Joshua M. Buck notes, the techniques that Ziegfeld used to glorify the American girl were first practiced upon the body of Sandow, an immigrant man.[108] In addition to advertising, marketing, and gossip, Ziegfeld built up Sandow as a sex symbol "in part by changing Sandow's costume to nothing but silk briefs, knowing that it would cause a sensation . . . Later, with the Follies, Ziegfeld sold his chorus girls in much the same way, rarely showing nudity—rather he presented something even more erotic. He knew how to present the human body so as to suggest and not to offend."[109] Therefore, while scientific curiosity was the official alibi for Sandow's exhibitions, sexuality, desire, and

eroticism were their primary drivers. In other words, Sandow's private exhibitions were a theatrically legitimized form of sex work. As Kasson writes, the depiction of these exhibitions shows "a confrontation between two kinds of power: social and financial power, signaled by the viewers' clothes; and physical power, signaled by Sandow's naked muscularity, which commands the attention of men and women alike."[110] Sandow's body becomes an entrepreneurial body, in a scene colored by an ambiguous sexuality; he "aroused a desire among men to emulate another man's body . . . mixed with an erotic impulse to *possess* it."[111] Fae Brauer, analyzing Sandow's body culture in the shadow of Oscar Wilde's trial and jailing for indecency, suggests that physical culture valorized a "virilizing homoeroticism."[112] In essence, the ambiguous homoeroticism of physical culture (especially its visual expressions—cabinet cards, magazines, and exhibitions) provided space for greater queer expression because it aligned with the wider national values of virility and empire.[113] Brauer uses Leo Bersani's concept of "desiring skin" ("a homosexuality without sexuality, where desire could circulate freely through intimate proximity, touch, and the gaze") to show how Sandow's Institutes, progenitors of the modern gym, could be sites of intense homoerotic expression. This concept is perhaps even more applicable to Sandow's private séances, where sexuality circulated through disavowed or not explicitly sexual touch.

Sandow's private meetings resemble a form of contemporary sex work exclusive to bodybuilding subculture known as "muscle worship." The sociologist Alan M. Klein in *Little Big Men*, his ethnography of bodybuilding in southern California, suggests that between 50 and 80 percent of male bodybuilders engaged in private meetings with men (and sometimes women); his informants called this "hustling."[114] Sex work of this kind is also mentioned by Arnold Schwarzenegger in his memoir *Education of a Bodybuilder.*[115] Today, muscle worship is openly discussed on the forums at Bodybuilding.com and Reddit. Sex work by male bodybuilders for both gay- and straight-identifying male clients is an open secret, as well as part of the economy of the practice—bodybuilding is expensive, and the routes to legitimate remuneration such as corporate sponsorship and prize money are few and far between. For Klein's informants, hustling was rationalized as an economic strategy, but also, for some, it seemed to serve "psychological needs," yielding the satisfaction of feeling "appreciated."[116] Klein pathologizes the practice, using the psychological diagnosis of narcissism to explain it. Hustling, for the sociologist, represents a larger complex of wounded masculinity that is addressed by accruing ever-greater gains of mass and size, which Klein terms "the hustler complex."[117]

I suggest that muscle worship, like Sandow's private exhibitions, demonstrates the way the direct engagement or consumption of *labor* (as in the watching of a performance) requires some form of "veiling" to become acceptable or appropriate. In his *Theories of Surplus Value* (1862–63),

Karl Marx makes a connection between the performing arts and "prostitution."[118] As Shane Boyle argues, Marx departs from Adam Smith's conception of these forms of service work as "unproductive" labor, for "the work of an actor or a butler can be either productive or unproductive depending on the social relations at play."[119] While Smith assumes that service labor is always sold *directly* to those who consume it, Marx argues that the relations of service labor are often organized around the mediating figure of the entrepreneur: "an entrepreneur of theatres, concerts, brothels, etc., buys the temporary disposal over the labor-power of the actors, musicians, prostitutes, etc.," he writes.[120] In other words, the unproductive labor of performance (or prostitution) is made productive when organized in the form of theater (or brothel). "Actors are productive workers," writes Marx, "not in so far as they produce a play, but in so far as they increase their employer's wealth."[121] While the actual substance and content of the actor's labor remains the same, the shifting form of organization of the work determines whether it is productive or unproductive, and I would argue, *appropriate* or not. Sandow's private exhibitions were palatable to a late nineteenth-century audience because the scene was organized as an extension of the *theatrical enterprise* that the audience had just seen. The mediation by the impresario Ziegfeld of the direct consumption of Sandow's physical labor by the customer looking and feeling enabled the event to evade its sexual nature, and be positioned under the different, more acceptable umbrellas of "science" or "art." While the practice of hustling or muscle worship (in which money changes hands directly between the consumer of services and the producer) must take place in hotel rooms behind closed doors, Sandow's exhibitions could be publicized and even written about in respectable outlets because of their social form, as a further layer of immersion in the spectacle.

In other words, while bodybuilding's anti-normative dimensions (i.e., its associations with the freakish, excessive, outlandish, feminized, and queer) were prompted by its theatrical nature, theatricality's very triviality and frivolity served as a cover for the material effects of this theatrical anti-normativity, in this case, an underground economy of sex work. In this way, it functioned similar to Michelle Liu Carriger's notion—in her analysis of the legal case of the Victorian cross-dressers Boulton and Park—of a "theatre defense," where "theatre's position (admittedly a contested one) in the center of respectable society provided an alibi and an outlet for socially unsanctioned behaviors and desires; one that, because always remaining within the realm of the fictive, could be tolerated by the authorities invested in disciplining their unruly subjects."[122]

In the subcultural practice of hustling, the built body disrupts not only normative articulations of sexuality, but also the way such articulations are deeply interconnected with modes of economic organization.[123] The form of entrepreneurial, bourgeois masculinity modeled by Eugen Sandow

seems to double back, folding in on itself, when taken to its logical extreme in the self-objectification of muscle worship, where self-possession is articulated in a scene of possession by the other. In exploring this challenge to bourgeois ideology through Sandow's private exhibitions, I am not advocating for any wider reading of sex work as politically resistant or disruptive. Muscle worship is also practiced by female bodybuilders, and broadening this reading would need to account for the structural differences in women's participation in sex work.[124] The fact that muscle worship is at least in part motivated by the illicit and expensive nature of the performance enhancing drugs (PEDs) used by bodybuilders also warrants further consideration. My reading of bodybuilding and sex work through the frame of labor and its organization is intended not as a sociological explanation for the phenomenon, or as advocacy, but rather is intended to restore texture and complexity to bodybuilding itself, which has often been considered as *either* representative of hegemonic hypermasculinity *or* as pathological gender deviance.

Muscle: The Musical: Bodybuilding and the Limits of Theatricality

What happens when theater professionals (directors, playwrights, stage managers, composers, designers, and actors) attempt to stage bodybuilding in the theater? Usually, a failed show, it seems. The "failure" of these projects, whether economic or aesthetic, suggests that muscle is a *problem* for the theater, one akin to the unwanted theatrical problems diagnosed by Nicholas Ridout such as stage fright, coughing, corpsing, and the animal on stage.[125]

In 2015, as I began preliminary research for this book, I became aware of a musical called *Muscle*. An adaptation of Sam Fussell's *Muscle: Confessions of an Unlikely Bodybuilder*, the musical had pedigree: a book by James Lapine (*Into the Woods*), lyrics by Ellen Fitzhugh (*Los Otros*), and music by William Finn (*Falsettos*). But the musical was beset by difficulties. It was originally conceived as a one-act in conjunction with Lapine and Stephen Sondheim's *Passion*, but Sondheim eventually abandoned the project, to be replaced by Finn.[126] The show never made it to Broadway, or off-Broadway either; it was only performed in a workshop reading at the Tribeca Performing Arts Center in 1995, and in a full production at Pegasus Players, a non-equity (non-union) theater in Chicago in 2001. It was reviewed poorly and has never been performed again.

Researching the musical was similarly difficult. My e-mails to Pegasus Players went unanswered. The production isn't even listed on their website. On an archival trip to the Billy Rose Theatre Division, I managed to track down the libretto for the abandoned version by Sondheim and

Lapine.[127] This was an early one-act version of the script, missing many of the musical numbers listed by Dietz in his *Complete Book of 2000s Broadway Musicals*. Strangely, a fragment of another abandoned attempt to adapt Fussell's book turned up, by the composer/lyricist duo of Scott Frankel and Michael Korie, no mention of which exists on the internet. Could it be that Frankel and Korie were also fascinated enough by Fussell's book to try and stage it?[128] These fragments were tantalizing and gave little indication of the production's finished form. Finally, I discovered that the Performing Arts Research Collection carried a recording of the 1995 workshop production of *Muscle*. I quickly made an appointment to view the material. When I arrived at the library at Lincoln Center, the librarian was puzzled. "This is really weird," she said, "apparently the recording is only viewable by people involved in the original production."

"You should e-mail James Lapine," my friend and colleague Jen Parker-Starbuck told me. "Apparently he's really nice and will respond right away." It was worth a shot. I found Lapine's e-mail via his website and wrote to him asking for help. Ten days later, he wrote back, asking what I was looking for. I e-mailed back saying that a copy of the script and score would be great, if possible. He responded that he had no idea if he could find one, but would get in touch if he did. I never heard from him again. My search had reached a dead end.

Everyone seemed to be embarrassed about *Muscle: The Musical*. The artists involved seemed to want to hide it from the world. Perhaps this was due to the work's failure, which in itself was perplexing, because Fussell's narrative is almost entirely concerned with the theatricality of bodybuilding. First published in 1991, the book describes Fussell's conversion to and eventual disillusionment with bodybuilding. Fussell, a bookish ectomorph, starts his story in New York, spending his days "running wide-eyed in fear down city streets; [his] nights passed in closeted toilet-bound terror in [his] sublet."[129] He discovers bodybuilding, packs on muscle like a suit of armor, and moves to southern California to pursue the sport. But he fails to place at a bench-press competition and a local bodybuilding show, and finally gives up the sport. Theatrical metaphors of costume, disguise, and persona abound throughout *Muscle*, tactics that enable Fussell to "hide." The writing itself performs a kind of heightened, theatrical distancing, looking awry at the writer's own story. In one notable scene, Fussell comes to understand bodybuilding as

> bad theatre. Every word they uttered, every move they made seemed rehearsed—as rehearsed, in fact, as any performance I'd ever seen on stage. . . . Much of being a bodybuilder, I gathered, meant playing at being a bodybuilder. . . . Since the first AAU Mr. America contest in 1939, bodybuilding involved premeditated reinvention. You chose who you wanted to be, and acted accordingly.[130]

Fussell then presents us with a vignette in which his gym buddies, Mousie and Sweepea, teach him "the Walk," "that peculiar weight-lifter's waddle."[131] He attempts to copy them—"I too jutted my arms out from my side, keeping my elbows on the same line as my shoulders. I too carefully walked with my legs spread far apart to prevent the horrors of inner-thigh chafing from the immense size of the quadriceps"—but it is awkward and unconvincing.[132] In this scene Fussell emphasizes reenactment; that is, the fact that becoming a bodybuilder not only demands actual reps on each exercise, but also the repetition of a performance. By pointing to this inherent theatricality—not just the performance of the male bodybuilder but its rehearsal—Fussell exposes what Judith Butler would call the "legacy of sedimented acts" through which the "body becomes its gender."[133] Furthermore, by evoking the theatrical, Fussell demonstrates the potential for difference and variation through excess, parody, and re-citation, hence the frequently outlandish and comic tone of his writing. In *Performance Remains*, Rebecca Schneider writes: "the threat of theatricality is still the threat of the imposter status of the copy, the double, the mimetic, the second, the surrogate, the feminine, or the queer."[134] By constantly emphasizing that muscle is a form of costume, Fussell enacts a kind of male drag, queering the image of the bodybuilder as an ideal masculine figure.

Muscle: The Musical gets the inherently theatrical world of bodybuilding wrong by treating muscle as *literal* costume. As shown in the few production photos (at the Pegasus Theatre) that are available, the actor playing Max (this musical's version of Sam Fussell), Rob Hancock, achieves his transformation with the aid of a padded muscle suit, designed by Nan Zabriskie. Although *Variety* magazine notes that this "works better than one might think," the production, it seems, was unable to decide on how to signify muscle. One of Max's gym buddies, Vinnie, is played by an actual bodybuilder (Brad Potts), while his other training partners are (to quote reviewer Lucia Mauro) merely "husky actors."[135] This multifarious theatricality, where "real" muscle confronts muscle that is just tried on, perhaps reflects Fussell's own ambivalence about the sport. But critics seemed to agree that what seemed like knowingly outrageous caricatures on the page came across as patronizing stereotypes when embodied in the theater.[136] Overall, this creative decision seems to demonstrate the same kind of discomfort and embarrassment with bodybuilding that I have pointed to earlier. It marks Fussell's transformation as *merely* costume, when the nature of bodybuilding (and the source of its discomfort for the audience) is the fact that its theatricality is built through fleshly labors. Unlike the winking presentation of the musical, Fussell was not dabbling. Rather, his labors built an armor suit of muscle that was nonetheless intrinsically part of his identity. When he stops bodybuilding and begins to shed weight, he writes: "as odd as it once felt to be a bodybuilder, it now felt odd *not* being one. I moved awkwardly, like a singer who doesn't

know what to do with his hands. 'The Walk' was an impossibility. There was nothing left to display."[137]

The suit of muscles, to return to Ngai's concept, is a theatrical gimmick. It is attention-grabbing (nearly every review of the production mentions it), but also obvious in its workings; it convinces no one that Hancock has *actually* transformed. Indeed, its aesthetic function rests on its transparency. Descriptions of the suit as "very clever" or "witty" are the reverse side of the same coin as reviewers' damning of the suit as "ridiculous."[138] The muscle suit can therefore be grouped together with other musical theater gimmicks such as *Miss Saigon*'s helicopter or *Phantom of the Opera*'s falling chandelier. In each example, the pleasure we take is rendered "cheap" because "certain capitalist operations" are made transparent, in this case, regarding the relation of audience attention to ticket sales.[139]

But real muscles are gimmicky too. Real bodybuilders onstage present a problem for the theater because the transparency of their labor resists incorporation into dramatic fiction. There are only a few plays about bodybuilding. One example is Fernando Arrabal's *Breviario de amor de un halterófilio* (1984), translated as *The Body-Builder's Book of Love* (though the title actually means *The Weightlifter's Book of Love*; "bodybuilder" in Spanish is *culturista* or *fisicoculturista*); the book is a "metatheatrical tour de force" for two men, a bodybuilder and his masseur, an "androgynous youth."[140] The first play of the English playwright John Godber, *Cramp* (1981), concerns the suicide of a bodybuilder. The scant online production history of these plays shows, however, that the directors did not cast actual bodybuilders in them, either in Tom O'Horgan's production of Arrabal's play at the INTAR Theatre in New York City (1990) or in Hull Truck's production of *Cramp* in 1986. Perhaps the directors of these productions anticipated the critical response given to Russell Labey's *Gods and Monsters* at London's Southwark Playhouse in 2015. Adapted from Christopher Bram's novel *Father of Frankenstein*, Labey cast the bodybuilding actor Will Austin as Clayton Boone, a gardener who poses in the nude for director James Whale. Austin's body and nude scenes were discussed in numerous breathless reviews. "Buttocks don't come more curvaceous, muscles more bulging or torsos more rippling than Will Austin's," writes *The Telegraph*'s Dominic Cavendish in a lukewarm, three-star review.[141] Even more bluntly, the theater blog *Partially Obstructed View* states: "Austin is so preposterously muscled I'm not entirely convinced we're the same species. . . . Also he has quite a big penis."[142] Austin's nude body became central to the show's draw. What critics could not do, however, was reconcile Austin's labored-over body with the fiction being presented ("I wonder how much this production will be remembered for the nudity and physical forms on display rather than the play").[143] By refusing its place within the narrative, by seeming excessive or outlandish, or by working too hard for the audience's attention, the gimmick of Will Austin's body

made transparent an economy of the theater in which attention (and ticket sales) are sought through the baring of muscle (and genitals) which cannot help but seem extra-theatrical, even if demanded by the script.

In *The Actor in Costume*, Aoife Monks writes: "the performer's presence seems to magnify when naked, becoming extra-present in performance, and this presence is often felt to disrupt the field of the narrative illusion."[144] The male bodybuilder on the stage accomplishes the same effect, even when clothed, since hyper-muscularity tends to even disrupt the signification of costume. Within the frame of the theater—a system of signs which constantly tries to distract from the material construction of its illusion—the bodybuilder's excessive embodiment resists signification, which is important to consider in the context of the range of narratives which it has been used to signify.

2017, Farringdon, London

It's June, and Pete and I are training together for the first time in ages: a mix of weightlifting and bodybuilding. With the cleans and squats I try to get Peter to focus on power and timing. But bodybuilding has a different mindset, a bit more meditative and mindful. We do strict shoulder presses, and Pete says, "let the lift start from your glutes." But I don't know how to do that if the glutes are held tight and not actually moving. Turns out, it's visualization, as if the impulse for the lift begins in that muscle, even if that muscle isn't working. This mindful approach begins to seem like a psychophysical tool, as in acting class. Lately, Peter tells me, he has been thinking about Michael Chekhov's exercises for the actor, where the actor performs a "psychological gesture" before entering the scene, to connect mind, body, and emotional state. There is a connection here. "When I started out training at drama school, I didn't want to use my body," Peter tells me, "because I was an athlete, and I wanted to be an actor, so I thought acting should be about the mind. But now I realize it's actually all about the body."

In this chapter, I have explored examples from across the history of bodybuilding that demonstrate the challenge to or corruption of bodybuilding (and by extension, fitness culture) by one of its constitutive elements, theatricality. I have deployed the long-held suspicion or hatred of theater as unnecessary, useless, decadent, deceitful, fake, feminizing, and queer in order to put pressure on associations of the muscular ideal as a normative (white, bourgeois, heterosexual, European, masculine) one. If hypermuscularity originated in antiquity, it was heightened and spread in the theater—or, to use a bodybuilding metaphor, if ancient Greece is the period where the built body bulked, the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century

theater is where that body cut, shaved, tanned, and oiled itself to contest-ready condition. This association of the male body ideal with a place typically associated with femininity, queerness, and immorality, I suggest, demonstrates that male bodybuilding, as much as female bodybuilding, challenges gender norms even though it seems to reify them.[145] In summary, though physical culturists and early bodybuilders established a normative model of masculinity, an embodied image of Wynter's descriptive statement of "Man," the inherent theatricality at the heart of their practice simultaneously worked to undo it. That is why, in some ways, bodybuilding has disavowed its association with theatricality: as Martin Puchner argues, "theatricality points to an anxiety that is located at the very center of various understandings of culture," because it demonstrates the fragility and mutability of social rituals.[146]

Seeing muscle as theatrical means seeing the normative performance of masculinity as a *script*, which leads to the possibility of loosening and subverting its accepted meanings. This might take place through theatrical practices such as nontraditional casting (that is, enabling different embodiments—gendered, queer, racialized, differently abled—to take up the role), or by emphasizing subtexts (such as heightening bodybuilding's status as a queer practice). Above all, a theatrical reading of masculinity prompted by male bodybuilding's excessive embodiment suggests a reading of gender as defiantly *agential*, outside the spectrum of biology and performativity. More speculatively, I want to put forward the idea that the conjunction between the "useless" labor of theater and the useless labor of bodybuilding suggests a way of queering normative regimes of value in neoliberal capitalism. This is not to suggest that bodybuilding is outside of neoliberalism or that bodybuilders are anticapitalist.[147] Even though bodybuilding labor (like the labor of acting) creates no product, it still creates value when organized like it currently is—fueling a corporate economy of supplements and sponsorship and reliant on a grey economy of steroids, and unspoken sex work.[148] But bodybuilding's particular stage magic—creating muscle through reps, food, sleep, and supplements—as an over-identified form of the self-made man, suggests that the bodybuilder might be both the embodiment of a descriptive statement of "Man" who was the center of a colonial-capitalist political economy and the promise of its refusal.

Although my purpose in this chapter was primarily to read the theatricality of bodybuilding through historical examples in the archive, my final ethnographic scene from the field, in dialogue with the bodybuilder Peter Moore, demonstrates the importance of an embodied approach to physical culture studies, because it reveals the theatricality of bodybuilding training, in addition to its presentation on the competition stage. In the scene, Peter's evocation of Michael Chekhov's psychophysical acting techniques raises ideas of consciousness and intention in "everyday" life. As we have seen with Bob Paris's posing routine, poses convert the functional

gestures and movements of the body (a raised arm, a clenched abdomen, contracting, expanding, stretching) into intentional and mindful gestures. But the same is true of training. The visualization technique Peter sought to communicate to me—what in bodybuilding is called the "mind-muscle connection"—like Chekhov's psychological gesture, transforms anatomy into expressive movement. I am reminded of *chādo*, the Japanese "way of tea," which is comprised of a rigid series of codified gestures (*temae*). Yet the expressive practice of *chādo* is not one of improvisational free movement, but a transformation of everyday gestures into "self-conscious," mindful, and intentional ones.[149]

While theatricality, as I have argued above, is historically associated with excess, fakery, feminization, and queerness, "intentionality" might also be seen as a definitional characteristic of theater. In her book *Murder by Accident,* Jody Enders explores a vast range of legal cases in medieval France of deaths onstage.[150] A death in the theater ruptures the theatrical because it is either an unfortunate accident that was not intended as part of the dramatic illusion, or it was an intentional murder (and thus not the intended faking of a murder required by theater). This leads Enders to state that "any interpretation of the conception, performance, or reception of theater must recognize that individuals or collectives who make theater *intend* to make theater."[151] Just as there is no murder by accident, there is no theater without intention. Following Enders, we might say that conscious intentionality is the essence of the theater; it is what makes an everyday gesture a theatrical one. Unlike Judith Butler's conception of performativity that seeks to foreground the unified subject as a fantasy, a "stylized repetition of acts," intentional theatrical gestures emphasize the consciousness of the subject.[152] The intentionality of an action challenges paradigms where the bodybuilder's body is read in relation to larger political, social, economic, gendered, or racial structures—as not merely a passive sculpted object, but an active subject.

To train biceps, one must think "I am working my biceps," not as mantra, but as embodied consciousness. One must see the shape of the muscle, how it interacts with other muscles in the body. One must express "biceps," even if only to an audience of oneself, when no one else is looking. Training with Peter prompted me to begin to incorporate bodybuilding alongside my Olympic weightlifting training, which I have done since the end of 2017. Although there is no room in this chapter to reflect on my own transformation via bodybuilding, my view of the practice has shifted from a more judgmental stance to one in which I am happy to use my body to express and construct a "built" masculine form in a manner that feels artistic, mindful, and meditative, rather than alienating. In the next chapter, therefore, I explore the trope of transformation more deeply.

Chapter 2

✦

Transformation

The Dynamic Tensions of "Before and After"

2019. London, England

> *@dangerology An (almost) end-of-year review*
>
> *Last September I decided to get as serious about looking strong as being strong. So coach @kristianandkilos and I put together a mixed program of Olympic lifting and bodybuilding, called it Olybuilding, and this is what happened over the year. It's been a pretty eventful year, with some real highs matched with real lows, but lifting has been a constant, all over the world, Manila, Vancouver, Austin, London.*
>
> *Let's see what 2020 brings.*
>
> *#olybuilding #bodybuilding #olympicweightlifting #olympic lifting #weightlifting #gym #fitness.*

The above excerpt from my Instagram account (see fig. 3) is a type of personal narrative written in the genre I call "the Bodybuilder's Journey." In its basic form, a Bodybuilder's Journey narrates the transformation of a subject through physical culture. Certain tropes of these stories are well known: weak (and often "sickly") origins; a starting weight of under 100 pounds; and an encounter with an image of ideal manliness, often in classical statuary. In Eugen Sandow's book *Strength and How to Obtain It*, he writes: "As a child, I was myself exceedingly delicate. More than once, my life was despaired of."[1] During a trip to Italy Sandow encounters "[strength] in bronze and stone," setting off his transformation.[2] The Bodybuilder's Journey is also a visual trope, represented with comparison photos, or the "before and after." These images proliferate on social media tagged with #bodytransformation and are often captioned with a short narrative. The video-sharing app TikTok has enabled an even more theatrical version of this trope, where participants film themselves in baggy,

Fig. 3. Broderick Chow (@dangerology), comparison photos, via Instagram. Screenshot by the author.

oversized clothing before cutting to a shot of themselves in the same position, revealing a ripped physique.[3]

Comparison photos go back to the origins of physical culture. As Kenneth R. Dutton notes, photography emerged contemporaneously with the science of physical culture. Physical culture photography drew on the aesthetics of painting, placing the built body in classical scenes using drapery, columns, and theatrical props. The early twentieth-century muscular male body was posed to resemble larger-than-life Greek and Roman sculptures, but was achievable, supposedly by any man, in the flesh.[4] It was Professor D. L. Dowd who first used the "before and after" photo series to prove the effectiveness of physical culture.[5] Thereafter, the "before and after" comparison swiftly became ubiquitous in physical culture media, with readers sending in before-and-after images to periodicals such as *Sandow's Magazine* and *Health and Strength*.

While functioning as purported evidence for the effectiveness of physical culture, before-and-after images are problematic for its study: how can

the still image function as evidence for a practice that is about the moving body? While the captured, arrested, mortified, and *still* image of the body is underpinned by a dynamic, agential, lively process of formation, many theorizations of physical culture and fitness are largely determined by the photographic archive. My aim in this chapter is to deploy an "embodied orientation" towards the archive, rereading materials that in the past have been taken as evidence of the disciplinary and biopolitical nature of fitness and physical culture. An embodied orientation considers affect, sensation, and the dynamic material of the body's corporeality. Bodybuilding and other transformative physical culture practices have often been read as evidence of a body *written* by discourse. But as the dance scholar Susan Foster notes, "[while] the body is capable of being scripted . . . in that writing, the body's movements become a source of interpretation and judgments."[6]

This chapter concerns three sites of "transformation." The first is the transformation of Charles Atlas, born Angelo Siciliano (1892–1972), from a skinny immigrant teenager in Brooklyn into one of the most famous representatives of American masculinity. Atlas is known primarily through his own self-publicity. The abundance of public, commercial materials on Atlas, and the correlative lack of private materials available, has led to his becoming demonstrative of a problematic trend in which a supposedly authentic "before" self is valorized over the constructed, built, or even "theatrical" muscular self. The second site of transformation is the life history of Stanley Hallam Rothwell (1904–1986), an English physical culturist and polymath. Rothwell left behind little in the public record but was a meticulous archivist of his own life and a prodigious writer. Drawing on his personal archive, I argue that Rothwell provides a striking reminder that to become an image is also to make an image, a dynamic process that is an act of physical agency. By following lines of practice, process, and becoming, I attend to those moments of bodily intensity that are rarely preserved in the archive—a version of what Elizabeth Freeman calls "erotohistoriography."[7] My third site concerns the role of physical culture in the transition processes of trans men and trans masculine, nonbinary people. Muscle-building is an important practice that enables transgender participants to sculpt their bodies towards both personal and culturally inscribed ideals of masculinity, often represented visually through before-and-after comparison photos. However, the work of transperformance (which the cultural scenographer Rachel Hann describes as "performances that enact and investigate trans as a political act of affirmation, self-determination, and the felt affects of cis regulation")[8] challenges the linear logic of transformation and ideas of cultural inscription. Finally, I use my own experiences of training to argue that practice and repetition, while disciplining the body, also resist the scripts that the body has learned and by which it is produced.

Sculpting Masculinities

In his *New Encyclopedia of Modern Bodybuilding*, Arnold Schwarzenegger describes bodybuilding as a "return to the Greek ideal—muscular development as a celebration of the human body."[9] Schwarzenegger refers to the Victorian fascination with sculptures of bodies, which would develop into a fascination for sculpted bodies. In 1854, plaster casts of classical statuary were displayed at the Greek and Roman Courts at the Crystal Palace exhibition in Sydenham, London.[10] At the same time, classical representations became a principal theme of physical culture stage spectacles. Scenes from mythology such as the Labors of Heracles became the favored subject of *poses plastiques* in the music halls; these *tableaux vivant* were also an excuse to gaze upon the bared male body.[11] Sandow dispensed with scenery in his appearances. A review of "Sandow's Trocadero Company" (undated) describes Sandow "first appear[ing] as a statue on a raised platform under a strong light and with a dark velvet background. He shows his muscles first in repose then with all muscles hard."[12] Sandow united aesthetic beauty with physical strength, turning his body, whitened with powder, into a re-creation of the Crystal Palace casts. This sculptural rhetoric persisted into the twentieth century, with the American sculptor Avard Fairbanks remarking of Steve Reeves: "He's the grandest example I have ever seen of Michelangelo's dream come true. It is unfortunate Steve Reeves was not living during the Renaissance period, for the Masters would have worn their hands to the bone making statues from him."[13]

Sculpture also appears as a pervasive trope in the Bodybuilder's Journey. Sandow, Atlas, and many others remark that seeing Greek and Roman statues was the primal scene that catalyzed their desire to transform their bodies. However, the conceptual frame of sculpture can also render the sculpted subject non-agential and objectified. The objectified body becomes a catalyst for bodily objectification. In histories of physical culture, sculptural tropes and the overwhelming evidence base of still, posed images of the body contribute to a paradigm of "inscription," which suggests that the body is constructed or "written" by social and historical contexts and structures. This approach is often associated with Michel Foucault, who, in his 1971 essay "Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire," writes: "the body is the inscribed surface of events" (*le corps: surface d'inscription des événements*).[14] Foucault's examination of the inscribed body was part of his larger examination of the interrelation of knowledge and power. His concept of "disciplinary practices" is part of a larger historical exploration of the transition from regimes of power exercised by punishing the body to situations where power is exercised through disciplined self-surveillance. Physical culture studies have sometimes decontextualized Foucault's concepts, reading built male bodies as disciplined, but not admitting agency

or subversions of power. In this paradigm, physical culture is what Louis Althusser would call an "ideological state apparatus," the effect of which is to discipline the body towards larger, loftier goals: the rationalization of the body demanded by Taylorist scientific management, and later, war. To sculpt the body is to *be* sculpted by the state or by capital. This sculpted body symbolizes a phallocentric, hard, hypermasculinity that is aligned to nationalistic, industrial, and/or fascist ends.

In the previous chapter, I discussed how this paradigm of the hard, sculpted, phallic male body was simultaneously undone by its theatrical presentation. In this chapter, I continue the line of thought developed in my concluding remarks on the process of training, that is, the sculpting of the body towards an image, reintroducing the body in its fleshly, dynamic corporeality to physical culture studies. How might the dynamic process of the body challenge, subvert, or undermine the body as sign? In her essay "Reading the Male Body," Susan M. Bordo distinguishes between the "phallus" (symbol) and the penis (real organ).[15] In contrast to the "universal," hard, unyielding symbol of the phallus, the penis, which Bordo describes as *mercurial*, "evokes the temporal not the eternal."[16] She summarizes: "the phallus is haunted by the penis"; in other words, the symbolic body is haunted by its vulnerable fleshly double.[17] Despite Bordo's strong critique of the social meanings and values that accompany the hard, masculine body, her remedy is not to valorize the soft and "feminine" instead, but to search for embodiments outside this binary. Returning to the dialectic of phallus/penis, she writes: "let's rather allow the imagination to play with the figure of the *aroused* penis—aroused (as in a state of *feeling*), rather than 'erect' (as in a state of accomplishment and readiness to perform)."[18] This suggests a shift in thinking from signification to affect, intensity, and becoming. To say "more penis, less phallus" is to attend to the embodied, lived experience of building men's bodies in their social, political, and historical contexts. This involves attending to the mercurial nature of the body's transformation, which seems to have its own will, sometimes recalcitrant, at other times pliant and yielding, dynamic and tensed, or vulnerable and flaccid. I suggest that such an approach to body studies is truer to Foucault's paradigm-shifting analysis of power through bodily process than the idea of straightforward "inscription."

Yours, in Perfect Manhood: Charles Atlas

Charles Atlas's transformation was both physical and social. Atlas was born Angelo Siciliano, in Calabria, Italy; at the age of eleven he immigrated to Brooklyn with his mother Francesca.[19] Because our understanding of Atlas is based primarily on his own self-presentation, he is an unreliable narrator, as the basic facts of his life were sculpted into a myth of the American

dream. In his 1921 *Physical Culture* article "Building the Physique of a 'Greek God,' " Atlas writes, "I ought to say that I was never sickly, but on the contrary, rather strong, though not unusually so."[20] By 1924, an advertisement in the September 1924 issue of *Muscle Builder* describes Atlas as having once been a "puny boy." This small change establishes a "before," enabling the biography to fall into the already-established framework of the Bodybuilder's Journey. In his teenage years, Atlas's English language class takes a trip to the Brooklyn Museum. "While the other boys were wandering about looking at other things," he writes, "I remained studying the magnificent bodies of Hercules, the Dying Gladiator, the Wrestlers, the Discus Thrower, the Boxer, and the rest of the splendid specimens of manhood."[21] He asks his teacher, Mr. Davenport, how he might become like them. Davenport brings him to the YMCA, and tells him: "Anyone willing to work for it can obtain the same muscular development."[22] Angelo goes home, begins working out with homemade weights and bodyweight exercises, reads the magazine *Physical Culture*, and sends away for mail-order manuals, and soon, he writes, "I felt myself growing stronger perceptibly."[23] At nineteen, Angelo begins working as a strongman for Coney Island vaudeville shows, and then as an artist's model.[24] He won Bernarr MacFadden's 1922 *Physical Culture* show at Madison Square Garden, the same year he officially changed his name to Charles Atlas.

Atlas was inspired to create his system of isometric exercise (which tenses muscle against muscle) while watching the big cats at the Bronx Zoo, who required no special equipment to keep fit.[25] In 1929, Atlas teamed with an entrepreneur and marketer named Charles Roman, and his mail-order course of "Dynamic Tension" was first marketed in 1936. The iconic ad for the course is a famous six-panel comic strip that has been printed in the back of magazines and comic books from the 1940s to the present day. The strip embellishes Atlas's story and has in many ways come to replace it. "Mac," a "97-pound weakling," is enjoying a day at the beach with his girlfriend when a well-muscled man, running by, kicks sand in their faces. Mac protests and is threatened and then dismissed by the bully. Humiliated, Mac sends away for Atlas's course, and like Siciliano is transformed—he returns to the beach and beats up the bully.

The cultural studies scholar Jacqueline Reich argues that Atlas's transformation constitutes "a racial remapping of interwar Italian identity onto the muscled American male body."[26] This "provided a model for which the individual could achieve his goals on his own regardless of class, race, or nationality."[27] For Reich, Atlas's transformation was one in which normative, hegemonic values were inscribed upon the body of a "white ethnic" Other, sculpting Atlas into the model American body, and subject. Indeed, as Lynne Luciano claims, Atlas could be seen as the model for assimilated young working-class immigrant men in New York, who "met in gyms or in basements three or four times a week to lift their way to a muscular

ideal."[28] While Reich, Luciano, and other scholars acknowledge the embellished nature of Atlas's biography, they nonetheless adhere to a linear chronology of the "before and after" narrative. In Reich's case, this results in a problematic authenticity being attributed to the "before" self, as if the transformed body/self were a false copy. Consider the "crucial distinction" Reich makes between Siciliano ("the actual, historical individual born in Italy who immigrated to the United States") and Charles Atlas ("the cultural representation, an ideal of American masculinity").[29] The transformed "after," in this reading, is a mere performance, not the real thing. This distinction is striking not only for its anti-theatricalism, but also for how similar Reich's insistence on using "Siciliano" throughout is to "deadnaming," a form of transphobic abuse where a trans person is referred to by the name he or she was assigned at birth. Atlas's bodily transformation comes to evidence social forces (of assimilation, individualism) inscribed on the body, and thus "his fitness plan provide[s] a blueprint for what it took to be a proper American man, one literally and physically fit for self-government."[30] Although of course, this is precisely how Atlas framed his own system: as a response to a perceived crisis in American masculinity catalyzed by Fordist transformations in economic production and the two World Wars.[31] Atlas's goal was the elevation of American men into a "perfect race," and he regarded "physical culture and muscle building as a part of national salvation."[32]

By focusing on the *script* of Atlas's transformation, we admit no possibility of variation or agency for the embodied subject who occupies such scripts, whether Atlas himself or his followers. From the perspective of performance, we must consider the body as dynamic, moving material that is constantly laboring to perform signifying gestures. It is in the repetition of these gestures that variations are produced. What if, instead of the wider historical narrative, we attend to the pleasure and pain of "Dynamic Tension," to the complex erotics of bodies practicing in gyms and basements? I now investigate this possibility through another sculpted body, Stanley Rothwell, whose papers afford an unusual consideration of embodied agency.

A Practiced Life: Stanley Rothwell

Stanley Hallam Rothwell (1904–1986) was a British former miner, artist's model, bodybuilder, boxer, wrestler, writer, and physical educator. Born on December 28, 1904, in Wigan, Lancashire (near Manchester) and raised in the nearby market town of Ashton-in-Makerfield, Rothwell eventually moved south to London where he became an artist's model. The London borough of Croydon registers that he died at home in Norbury, south London, on October 31, 1986. He was preceded in death the same year by his

wife, Cecilia Eliza Rothwell, and survived by his son, William Rothwell. Rothwell's papers, now housed in the Stark Center, document a life of image-making. His muscular body is captured not only by the sculptures he posed for, but by hundreds of photographs, from his teenage years into his seventies.

Rothwell's body quite literally became sculpture, serving as an ideal image of masculinity for artists including Charles Sergeant Jagger, Josefina de Vasconcellos, and Alfred Hardiman. How might his personal archive—filled with annotations, drafts, unpublished writings, and ephemera—put pressure on readings of the inscribed body to which more famous physical culturists such as Charles Atlas are subject? An initial example might be provided by comparing Rothwell's Bodybuilder's Journey, as written up in the *Daily Mirror*, his employer, with his own annotations of photographs from the time. (Rothwell was part of the *Mirror*'s nighttime cleaning staff years after his career as a "professional body" had ended.) The 1968 profile of Rothwell in the *Mirror* calls him an "idealist" who "sought physical perfection—and very nearly found it."[33] The article begins with the Bodybuilder's Journey script, citing Atlas: "Young Stan was a weedy child. The original man who got sand kicked in his face."[34] A childhood bout with illness inspired Stan to develop his body. At age twenty-four Stan moved to London, and owing to his splendid physique, he became a pub "chucker-out" (a bouncer). His physical skills impressed a customer, a wrestling fan, who convinced him to train at Father Preedy's Wrestling Club.[35] Stan spent the next few years as a wrestler, and eventually became a physical education instructor for the Lambeth borough council. The *Mirror* article emphasizes that "some of London's famous sculptures were modelled from Stan's posing, including the figures over the door of County Hall and the Ypres Memorial" (see fig. 4).[36]

Less emphasis is given to the fact that Rothwell was also an amateur artist himself, a painter and draftsman, or to his statement: "Art and physical culture became complementary."[37] The article ends with a description of an exercise: "Throw about a dozen pieces of paper on the floor, then pick them up. Straighten up after each bend. If you repeat this about twelve times a day, unwanted fat around the waist will disappear after about five weeks."[38] At the center of the page is a photo of Rothwell (see fig. 5), in white bathing trunks, standing in the sea and posing like a statue.

As presented in the *Mirror* article, Rothwell's life story contains many of the key markers of the Bodybuilder's Journey. It is a story of transformation from a weak youth to a paragon of manhood, to "physical perfection." Physical strength is promoted as a virtue, in the form of Rothwell's role policing the pub for rowdies and drunks. There is even an encounter with the sculptural, but this time it is Stan's body that becomes sculpture. But the process of transformation itself is occluded. The article ends by suggesting a strange exercise of picking up papers, which seems to

Fig. 4. Alfred Frank Hardiman, *Open Space*, installed at County Hall, London. Wikimedia Commons.

refer to Rothwell's current occupation as a cleaner. But Rothwell clearly did not build his physique by picking up papers.

In contrast, in figure 6, we see a 1967 photograph of Rothwell "lifting two men" at the *Daily Mirror* sports and social club. The shot is blurred, a botched exposure by the photographer. On the back, Rothwell wrote:

> Some of my critics doubt[ed] my ability to lift. I only used weights to train along with my other activities. I was not a competing lifter or record breaker, there was no purpose for me to be, but having developed a nice physique they continuously taunted me with "Ah! but what can he lift?" I did this feat to demonstrate what I could do. They said it was impossible to lift two men with [text ends].

The same folder contains another, unblurred snapshot of the same lift: this image shows Stanley smiling, his tensed right arm hoisting two younger men into the air with some sort of strap. The back of this photo also gives

Fig. 5. Stanley Rothwell posing in the sea before the Le Plus Bel Athlète du Monde contest, 1939. Stanley Rothwell Papers, H. J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, University of Texas at Austin.

more information: another hand (likely his son, William or wife, Celia) has written: "STAN ROTHWELL In his younger days giving his friends a bit of a lift," dating the image December 2, 1967. However, it is the first, botched photo that Rothwell has chosen to caption with his memories. In many ways, it is the more interesting one. In this photo, we see traces of *movement*, the stages of Rothwell's arm as it hoists the men in the air, their feet touching and leaving the ground, but ghostly, insubstantial. In trying to capture movement, the camera creates phantoms.

I am interested in following movement, however imperceptible, across Rothwell's life and transformations. Rothwell's life was marked by not one but multiple transformations: weak youth turned strong man; northern boy making good down south in London; and his multiple careers. Rothwell seems to embody multiple economic, social, and political transformations in the history of Britain, especially the shift from a manufacturing economy reliant on northern coal mining to an economy of financial services and immaterial labor concentrated in London and the southeast. But to read Rothwell's *body* as simply constructed by such social transformations is to pass over the crucial dynamics of his life. A closer look at Rothwell's papers restores him to his own narrative, as an embodied subject *practicing life*.

Rothwell left behind a lot of images: of his lean and muscular body, his slightly sinister smile, large dark eyes, and a shock of black hair which

Fig. 6. Blurred photo of Stanley Rothwell lifting two men. Stanley Rothwell Papers, H. J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, University of Texas at Austin.

turned grey later in life but remained thick. Although there are several folders of candid, nonprofessional photos of him, the collection is dominated by Rothwell's artist modeling: still poses to be re-created by sculptors in clay, marble, and bronze. Here is Stanley holding a pose of an archer, a discus thrower, a dying soldier, again and again. The repetition produces for the researcher the effect of constant preparation, rehearsal, and deferral, indexing a different relation to time that resists the trope of "before and after." Giulia Palladini likens this temporality of deferral to "foreplay" in sex. While foreplay projects forward to climax, at the same time it resists its completion, for "the 'event' that might possibly bestow its ontological status on the foreplay is precisely what would put an end to foreplay as such."[39] Palladini connects foreplay to the notion of the *amateur* (drawing

on its etymology, *amare*, "to love"), a word that describes the "condition of many theater artists, who remain 'amateurs' insofar as the product of their theater labor has not achieved the status of event in a specific economy of attention" (and as distinct from amateur dramatics, which exists in a relation of leisure to another economy of production).[40] This condition, of course, does not only apply to theater labor, but rather to *precarious labor* in general, which becomes productive labor only when consumed. Palladini draws attention to the role that love, desire, and pleasure play in sustaining an activity without compensation, and to identify an emergent form of resistance. "Just like in foreplay," she writes,

> what supports the doing of precarious labor can always be pleasure rather than finality, even if its time is always already projected towards a horizon of productivity. The sort of resistance that a precarious laborer can perform is a resistance of the conditions of production that are given as the presupposition of a desired realization of her labor in something achieved, something produced, something consumable. She can resist this realization of her labor, I suggest, by *making love to her own time*—making time itself her lover, as it were.[41]

Palladini's concept is useful in disrupting the linear temporality transformation as before and after, and furthermore helps us to reconcile two crucial aspects of Rothwell: Rothwell as *artwork*, and Rothwell as *artist*.

Before the term "precarity" entered common discourse, Rothwell's simultaneous, multiple careers exemplified the condition. The term "general assistant," given as his occupation on his death certificate by his son, euphemistically suggests his precarious status as a factotum. The politics of work pervades Rothwell's autobiographical writings, albeit in unexpected ways. His unpublished manuscript "The Roads That Lead from Wigan Pier"—the title is a play on George Orwell's book on impoverished living conditions in northern England in the 1930s—describes Rothwell's conversion to physical culture while coping with the forced idleness of the 1921 mining lockout. As a way of passing the time, Stan and his friends wrestle, swim, and train. While Stan acknowledges that he took up training after his hospitalization with diphtheria at seventeen, which left him in a weak state and worsened the partial deafness he was born with, the scenes he describes in vivid detail, those he emphasizes, are generated by the deferral and refusal of productive time.[42] He describes the strength competitions they created, including weightlifting and wrestling. On one occasion, "a man with a rugged physique" appears in the heath where Stan and his friends are gathered; this turns out to be the wrestler Jack Arnold, who challenges any man to fight him, and likens Stan's physique to "a young Hackensmids."[43] In one particularly idyllic scene, Stan and his

mates come "to an ancient stone that had up-to-date refused to give way to any attempts to turn it over, or even move it." Stan, of course, moves the stone "with one supreme effort"—"the first time it had been moved since before the creation of Adam."[44] The performance causes Stan's friends to marvel over his arms in Lancastrian dialect: "'Geeze bloody 'ell, what bloody arms tha's gettin!' exclaimed Jabe, who had always been considered the strong boy of our gang."[45]

Rothwell also has a "primal scene": encountering the built male body objectified in sculpture. Once again, the situation is more complex than it initially appears. Rothwell encounters these statues not as a viewer, but as a student of art. Towards the end of the lockout, Stan is healthy and strong, but he feels intellectually inferior. Having done poorly at school, he refers to himself on numerous occasions as a "dunce." "I wanted somehow to improve myself," he writes, "I took stock of myself and my life."[46] Deciding to enroll at the Wigan Mining and Technical College, he passes a queue of pupils awaiting interviews at the Mining Department, and instead goes straight to the Art Department. "I want to paint," he says, and after being rebuffed by the art master several times, he is "taken into the art class under strong protest."[47] At one anatomy lesson, Mr. Fairhurst, the art master, shows plaster reproductions of the *Hermes* of Praxiteles, the *Apollo Belvedere*, and the *Discobolus* of Myron.[48]

> "Such perfection cannot ever be achieved in reality," said someone. I still stood gazing at the statues. I said: "It's possible." "Never!" said an authority on these matters. "Especially among miners," he added cynically, eyeing me over. I was undersized and scrawny in those days, but I made up my mind there and then that that would be my purpose and my "Ideal" to emulate these Greek statues.[49]

Again, we have the emulation of a visual ideal. And yet, Stan's artistic training disrupts the narrative of straightforward inscription. While his hopes of earning a living as an artist are dashed by the poor reception of his end-of-year exhibition, he maintains throughout his life a sense of himself as an artist.[50]

Stanley Rothwell painted throughout his life. Several images in his archive show him posing beside his works, large canvases in oils, usually landscapes. The paintings are competent, although somewhat generic in subject matter. What gives a greater sense of his artistic skill are the sketches dotted throughout his papers, such as a small sketch of a well-muscled youth on the inside back cover of his diary; and his notations for physical exercises, which are simple but show a clear understanding of movement and physicality. Although the finding aid to the collection notes that "he worked as a visual artist throughout his life," Rothwell never earned a living from his art, as confirmed by his son.[51] His work

was *amateur*, in the truest sense, motivated by love. It is clear from Rothwell's many unpublished essays that he approached physical culture and artistic practice as one and the same, as expressions of a natural ideal and the harmony of the universe. In several essays, he speaks about "the Ideal" and the Greek concept of *arete*, or excellence, which he finds in both art and physical culture. While this excellence at times seems to resonate with an instrumentalized and even nationalist reading of physical culture, Rothwell's motivations go far beyond work discipline, towards a vision of a better society built upon human freedom and cooperation. In a 1950 manuscript entitled "The Art of Physical Culture" (redrafted in 1972 as "The Art of Physical Re-Creation"), he writes: "Physical Culture can be likened to the works of fine arts, and one who practices it to an artist, in so far that his work is creative and demands an aesthetic appreciation of form with grace of movement."[52] In this, he adheres to the Greek models that suggested there existed a priori principles of harmony in the universe, for the "embodiment of the ideal is balanced, tuned, and in rhythm with nature."[53]

In his references to ancient Greece and his advocacy of moral principles through physical exercise, Rothwell was little different from any other physical culturist of the early twentieth century. Yet, it is important to consider the context of these writings. Very few of Rothwell's essays were published in physical culture magazines; most of his writings were composed from the 1950s onwards, with the bulk of the texts appearing in the 1970s, towards the end of his life. Rothwell never claimed to have a unique "system" (such as Atlas's Dynamic Tension), nor, except for putting his name to a piece of fitness equipment ("the Rothwell Chest Expander") manufactured by a man called Neville O'Brien, was he really an entrepreneur. The manuscripts, then, are Rothwell's "working-outs," evidence of him thinking through in writing what physical culture meant to him. In this, he was a kind of lay philosopher. In a manuscript called "To the Reader," he notes that many of his ideas are "gleaned from my reading of other men's writing mixed with thoughts of my own," although they are rarely attributed, and many manuscripts are simply notes on a topic.[54] In other words, they are reflections on a *practice*, one that he kept up throughout his life.

In the 1980s, Rothwell became increasingly interested in biological processes and their relation to overall health. He writes: "We forget that the human body is, in its living state, a unity, a complete and rounded whole, every sensation, force or manifestation of force, every interrelation of the material of one part is intimately concerned with the sensation, force manifestation, and interrelation of all the other parts."[55] He explored metabolism and systems of repair and recovery, and took notes on "DNA, RNA and ATP" under the heading "data to work on." What interested Rothwell about biology, it seems, was the idea of *process* itself; that the

human being, utterly *unlike* a sculpture, was continuously being made and remade. To return to Palladini's concept, the moment of a final "production" of the ideal body is forever deferred, since the ideal body is actually a process of self-making by a body that is continuously shifting and transforming, indeed, at a cellular level. So although we might see Rothwell as a frustrated artist, channeling his desire for expression into the cultivation of a perfect body, another way of seeing it is that his performances of the body—posing, wrestling, gymnastics, training—were a way of refusing the temporality by which an artistic practice ends in a finished product.

If Rothwell, as suggested by his writings, viewed physical culture as a practice akin to art, the photographs of himself in still poses should be read as something akin to "performance documentation" rather than as petrified, objectified *images*. Indeed, the poses are not "still"—but are full of tension, movement, life. To pose is to perform a series of muscular contractions, holding the body in tension for a sometimes quite prolonged duration. We see this in Stan's re-creations of classical statuary. For example, in figure 7 (taken around 1934), Rothwell is shown in the *Discobolus* or discus thrower pose, balancing on one foot, right arm extended in front of him, left arm held elegantly behind him in a slightly curved fashion. The pose is meant to create the effect of a discus thrower in mid-throw, but I read the movement in this image as entirely contained. The tension in Rothwell's left quadriceps produces striations down his leg; similarly, the flexion of his deltoids visibly separates his pectorals, while contracting his trapezius muscles. This is a body contracting, not in the flow of movement, but exuding the potential of movement. The physical demands of posing are confirmed in a scene from "The Roads That Lead from Wigan Pier," where Rothwell describes his first sitting at the Royal Academy of Arts. His shyness at posing nude leads him to pose with his back to the class of "young ladies." The effect of the sunlight against the white backdrop, combined with the pose, makes Rothwell faint; he awakes "surrounded by half a dozen girls splashing water on my face to bring me to."[56] "Posing is a painful job," he writes:

> Sometimes one has to stand hours in crippling positions, when shooting pains strike throughout one's body like a lot of hot wires being drawn through one's limbs then numbness, it also demands fitness of an unusual degree to stand the cold, one cannot take liberties with oneself to keep it up and get a living from it.[57]

This passage might lead the reader to question why Rothwell would choose such a profession.[58] Again, the answer must be *pleasure*. But what kind of pleasure is it? The tension in the body suggests pleasure in the intensity of endurance, akin to experiments with duration in performance art.[59] But there is also another pleasure from the *theatricality* of the pose. Rothwell's

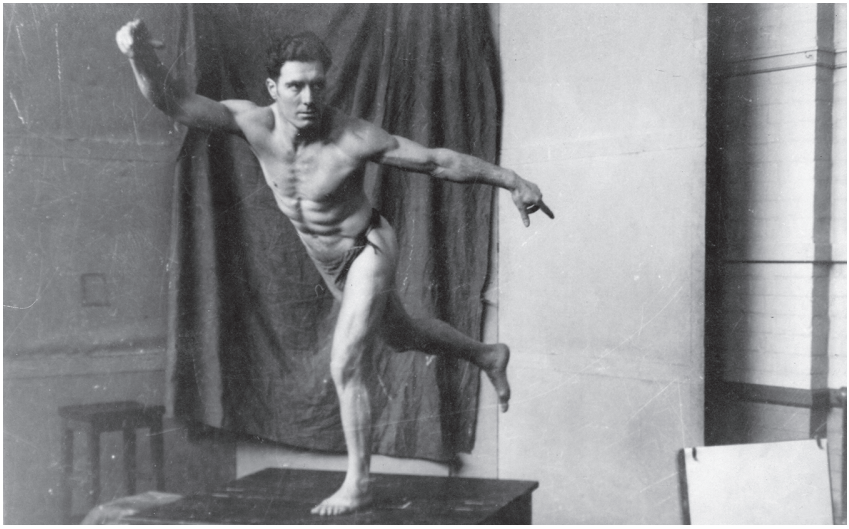

Fig. 7. Stanley Rothwell posing as a discus thrower. Stanley Rothwell Papers, H. J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, University of Texas at Austin.

pleasure in the posing can only come from its place in an economy of representation, the fact that the pose *is there to be captured,* and it is this possibility of reproduction as image, the very thing that puts an end to the act of posing, that gives the pose meaning. As Rebecca Schneider writes, "the freeze or lag in time that is the moment of arrested stillness defines a pose as a pose and might grant the pose a kind of staginess, or theatricality, as if (paradoxically perhaps) theatricality were the very stuff of an inanimate stillness."[60] Theatricality is the excess, remainder, or emphasis that marks Rothwell's posing as practice and Rothwell as an artist. Thus, his photo archive is less evidence of a body transformed than documentation of an artistic practice of *transformation*.

The "candid" images in the Stanley Rothwell Papers show that Rothwell continued to pose in his "free time." In the 1930s he performed for a short while with the Quo Vadis Bros., a variety act specializing in hand-balancing; and he continued to practice his skills long after he left the troupe. Rothwell and his friends would perform hand balances at public swimming pools and parks. In figure 8, we see him basing a handstand with his friend Edwin Picton, captioned: "A former gym mate from Ashton-in-Makerfield. Edwin was one of the La Volgas Bros. This was taken in the afternoon when war was declared."[61] Another series of photos, taken in Kennington, depict Rothwell as flyer, balancing from the hands of his friend Cliff Attenborough. Rothwell performed overhead lifts with tourists and swimmers at the Serpentine, in London's Hyde Park. "It

Fig. 8. Stanley Rothwell and Edwin Picton practicing acrobalance at Brockwell Park Lido, 1938. Stanley Rothwell Papers, H. J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, University of Texas at Austin.

did not matter how big or fat they were," he wrote, "I used to hoist them over head for souvenir snaps."[62] When no other people were available, he would pose alone, performing handstands, lifting weights, or simply showing off his physique for the camera, as in a 1934 photo showing him at his most muscular, captioned "Blackpool was mine in those days."[63] The theatrical pleasure of Rothwell's self-representation cannot be understood only by ideas of inscription or social construction. Instead, it is the performance of a self-made embodied subject "flexing," which is to say, contracting time and history.

Trans-/formation

In a 1952 advertisement, Charles Atlas proposed that his physical culture could "make you a new man" in fifteen minutes a day. Richard O'Brien's *The Rocky Horror Show* (1973), a parodic musical where a cis-heteronormative couple find themselves in a house of queer horrors, reframed this statement entirely, or at least brought out its underlying gender trouble. In the number "Charles Atlas Song," Dr. Frank-n-Furter, a "sweet transvestite from Transexual, Transylvania," reveals his creation, the artificially made, blond bodybuilder Rocky Horror. Here, Charles

Atlas's transformation narrative is reframed not only as a narrative of queer desire (where one's transformation might be for other men), but also as one where the everyday tropes of physical culture ("press-ups and chin-ups . . . the snatch, clean and jerk" / "nutritious high protein") are made the technologies of a manufactured "perfect manhood."

In 2015, *Men's Health* magazine ran its second annual "Ultimate Guy" contest, a modern version of the readers' contests in *Sandow's Magazine*. Readers sent in their photos and stories, vying for the chance to be a cover model. One of those men was Aydian Dowling, who became a finalist, and his story ran in July of that year, accompanied by quotes we would associate with the Bodybuilder's Journey: "no matter who you are, you can be the man you want to be. . . . It's fully possible if you put the time and effort and balance it takes to find the man in you."[64] *Men's Health* writer Andrew Daniels continues: "It took 21 years for Dowling to find that man. Dowling was born female, and says 'there were definitely signs' that he identified as male at an early age."[65] The narrative states that Dowling first identified as a lesbian as a teenager, began dressing in masculine clothes in his twenties, and finally began testosterone replacement therapy in 2009 and had top surgery in 2012. As a trans man, Dowling's Bodybuilder's Journey both replicates and complicates the narrative of transformation that this chapter has articulated. I now depart from his story to explore how trans- performances of physical culture and trans studies might be useful interlocutors to the highly straight, cis, and normative ideas of transformation that are prevalent in both physical culture and its attendant theorizations.

For many trans men, muscle-building is a significant part of their gender transition.[66] Rebecca Farber suggests that fitness "enables some transgender men to achieve a more harmonized sense of self in accordance with their ideals of maleness and masculine embodiment."[67] Trans men who are fitness enthusiasts find community formation online by sharing tips on training, supplements, and performance enhancing drugs, and by celebrating milestones. One user, for example, writes: "Guys. I have traps. For the first time in my life I can actually see that muscle. It feels f—ing amazing."[68] In addition to signifiers of maleness and masculinity such as building pecs (pectoral muscles) after top surgery, acquiring a "V-shaped" torso, and deemphasizing the hips, Farber's interlocutors "revealed how physical practices and outcomes in strength and muscularity transcended the physical body," informing a "feeling" of masculinity through fitness.[69]

The use of transformation/transition "timeline" videos and side-by-side comparison photographs are a key aspect of participation in these spaces, enabling the representation of the transition as "linear" and "smooth."[70] These digital technologies replicate the transformational logic of the physical culture "before and after," as does Dowling's narrative in *Men's Health*, where he states, "It just felt like I had finally finished growing up."[71] Yet,

for some trans studies scholars, the idea of a smooth and linear "before and after" transition problematically replicates "transnormative" ideas in which the transition marks an end point or arrival (as in Dowling's narrative). As Austin H. Johnson defines it, "transnormativity is an ideology that structures trans identification, experience, and narratives into a realness or trans enough hierarchy that is heavily reliant on accountability to a medically based, heteronormative model" which expresses itself in ideas of being "born in the wrong body," and promotes essentializing narratives of trans experience that strip the agency of trans identity from the subject.[72] Linear ideas of transition may inscribe dominant ideas of gender, collapsing individual journeys into medicalized narratives.[73] Furthermore, intersectional considerations of "transness," especially in relation to race, must consider the political and material violence that precedes our notions of fixed and patriarchal gender identities, as Black feminist thinkers such as Hortense Spillers have noted.[74] Hence, for Farber, the empowerment of fitness for her trans masculine interlocutors is "fractured," since it "both reifies and resists hegemonic cultural and institutional ideals of sex and gender."[75]

How might an expanded understanding of transformation in physical culture, as I have articulated in this chapter, be in dialogue with physical culture as a trans- practice? More specifically, how might trans artists working on and through physical culture as trans performance align physical culture transformation with understandings of trans- outside of the linear and normative medical model of the "before and after"? As C. Riley Snorton, in his book on Blackness and transness in history, suggests, while "'transition' is deployed for organizing time according to a linear or teleological formulation of progress," "'trans' is more about a movement with no clear origin and no point of arrival."[76] How might performance reveal the entanglement of the "movement" of trans- with the messy, complicated work of the "formation" of the body?

Over twenty years prior to Aydian Dowling's appearance in the pages of *Men's Health*, the photographer Loren Cameron turned his lens to himself in a triptych of black-and-white self-portraits collected under the title "God's Will." These images were then republished in his first collection, *Body Alchemy*, alongside photographs of other trans men before and after their transition. In "God's Will," there is no before. There is merely Cameron's body, posed and flexing in classic bodybuilding poses. The background of the images is cloudy and unclear, like a photographer's drape, and the effect consciously recalls fin-de-siècle photographs of physical culturists. In the text to *Body Alchemy*, Cameron is explicit about his desire to become a bodybuilder: "So much about my coming to manhood has been about a quest for size. I mean, I really need to be a big man. All of the men I've looked to as role models have been body-builders and athletes. They seem like gods and great beasts to me in their huge and beautiful bodies.

I envy them. I want to be like them. They look so virile and invincible."[77] Cameron's nudity in the images, for art scholar Melanie Taylor, reveals the "dissonant elements of his gender performance," because "the already far-from-secure expression of masculine identity that the bodybuilder represents can be seen to be further burdened by images showing a man who does not have a penis."[78] However, in playing intertextually with the visual history of physical culture, Cameron is also marking trans- as training. It is not the absent penis that is the *punctum* of his images but the flex of his biceps, the dumbbell he holds, and the most dissonant prop within the triptych, a surgical scalpel.

The interaction of photography and the built trans-male body has also been explored by the Canadian-American nonbinary artist Cassils (who uses the pronouns they/them). Cassils has explored bodybuilding since 2011 as part of a larger artistic exploration of transgender as becoming. In 2011's *CUTS: A Traditional Sculpture*, they document the process of gaining a pound of muscle mass per week over twenty-three weeks, supported by a training regime from coach Charles Glass, a nutrition plan from David Kalick, and a cycle of "mild steroids."[79] *CUTS* responds to Eleanor Antin's 1972 piece *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture*, in which Antin lost weight over forty-five weeks through crash dieting. Like Cameron, Cassils's photographs play with the visual referents of physical culture and bodybuilding.[80] The documentation of Cassils's transformation—four grids of photographs from the front, rear, and both profiles, against a stark white background—is both clinical and highly theatrical: it is a representation of the "quarter turn" mandatory poses in an onstage bodybuilding competition. These poses are not relaxed, but flexed, a heightened state of tension required by bodybuilding performance. For Hella Tsaconas, in this piece Cassils plays with the mathematic quantification of the body; she suggests it is an "athletic" performance, "a mode of performance that is first and foremost concerned with the explicit and intentional measure of bodily capacity."[81] As a trans- body, Cassils's body queers athletics, subverting the "the modern regime of individual responsibility, the system of knowability in which the body can only be an independent and discrete entity, capable of actions that render it—through its own sheer force—more desirable and more valuable, under capitalism," and the way this system is distributed along patriarchal gendered lines.[82]

As an intervention into physical culture, though, Cassils's trans-/formation of their body suggests a processual reading of bodily transformation that rejects the fixed temporal categorization of before and after. Although the grids can be read in a linear fashion, the sheer volume of the images and the minute differences between them suggest—for this weightlifting author—the repetitions, or reps, that are the basis of any physical culture program. Reps harden bodies and sculpt them towards normative categories of gender; they inscribe ideology upon muscles and tendons. But

in another way, reps do the opposite and reveal the incomplete inscription of the body by demonstrating how it must continually be remade. In her essay "Against Ordinary Language," writer Kathy Acker, who took up bodybuilding for over ten years, describes how bodybuilding seemed to reject writing: "I . . . some part of me . . . the part of the 'I' who bodybuilds, was rejecting language."[83] Reps and sets in bodybuilding reduce language to "a minimal, even a closed, set of nouns and to numerical repetition, to one of the simplest of language games."[84] This language of the body rejects the fixity of signs, even (or especially) the sign of the bodybuilder's body: "By trying to control, to shape, my body through the calculated tools and methods of bodybuilding, and time and again, in following these methods, failing to do so, I am able to meet that which cannot be finally controlled and known: the body."[85] This opens another epistemology of the body, not fixed to knowability or inscription: "When all is repetition rather than the production of meaning, every path resembles every other path," which is also to say that every path—queer, fugitive, or otherwise—is possible.[86]

Acker states that "bodybuilding is about failure because bodybuilding . . . occurs in the face of the material, of the body's inexorable movement toward its final failure, toward death."[87] Returning to Cassils, there is a freedom—and not just resistance—in the "reps" of *CUTS*. But there is also a reminder of the violence to which the trans- body is subjected; the (thousand) *CUTS* of the title that does double duty as both a physical culture term and an invocation of the daily violence of transphobia and cisnormativity. In this context, Cassils's artwork can be read as a demand for "more life," expressing itself as "more size, more mass, more gains." The violence of the categorized and knowable body is further explored in their performance *Becoming an Image* (2012). The performance consists of Cassils's trained and muscular body punching and kicking a 2,000-pound block of clay. Taking place in total darkness, the performance is illuminated periodically by a photographer's camera flash. We hear Cassils's breathing, smell their sweat, and feel the force of their body against an object, but our desire to see the action itself is denied. Conceived as a site-specific response to the ONE National Lesbian and Gay Archives in Los Angeles, traces of *Becoming an Image* were then shown in an exhibition that featured a series of images depicting Cassils's built body performing violence and having violence done to it, and two sculptures that resulted from the performance: a block of clay, and its casting in black concrete. In their 2015 artist's talk, Cassils describes their performance of trans "not as the crossing from one sex to another, but rather as a continual becoming, a process-oriented way of being in a space of indeterminacy, spasm, and slipperiness."[88] Yet, *Becoming an Image* is structured to deny the spectator access to the process of becoming. We do not see the gestures, only the images; not the act of sculpting, but the sculpture itself. The images that result are not exactly a "pose," though, like Rothwell's, the body is clearly

in a state of tension. Rather, the images are an attempt to control objectification which at the same time show that this process is often out of the subject's control. For Nicholas Chare and Ika Willis, bodies that subvert normative notions of gender are simultaneously limited by the way they are objectified by others.[89] In the curation of this performance, Cassils is able to "simultaneously examine the violence inherent in such acts of objectification and to exercise agency, articulating a trans subjectivity that potentially resists processes of objectification."[90]

An example of the violence of categorization/objectification, as well as freedom from this violence in the industry of professional bodybuilding, is provided by the Hong Kong professional bodybuilder Siufung Law. Law identifies as nonbinary and genderqueer, which they define as "a process to break through binaries and understand trans as a continual process of becoming."[91] They write: "I was assigned female at birth, and while I am socially male in my daily practices, I voluntarily choose to embody a female identity when I am in the gym, surrounded with people who know I am a female bodybuilder and participate in the female category in bodybuilding contests."[92] Law understands their own malleable sense of gender through Buddhist conceptions of the self, or "non-self," a self with no fixed or underlying substance but "subject to impermanence and conditions."[93] In 2018, during a bodybuilding competition in Vancouver, Canada (where Law became the first Hong Kong female bodybuilder to win IFBB Pro Status), Law's fluid gender expression came up against the institution of bodybuilding itself. While Law voluntarily adopted the requisite onstage markers of femininity for their category (makeup, sparkly bikini, open-handed poses), within weeks rumors began circulating that Law had been assigned male at birth. At the same time, women bodybuilders were disdainful of Law's masculine gender expression offstage.[94] Law's trans- performance, like Cassils's, demonstrates the violence of our misogynistic and racist categorical systems, especially in sport, which, as Jennifer Doyle states, "can only see the woman athlete as always already debilitated."[95] Yet Law has continued to compete in bodybuilding and—like Aydian Dowling—uses their platform to advocate for gender inclusion in physical culture and sport.

As Law writes, their genderqueer "journey" is not a transnormative narrative of linear before and after, but instead "suggests how *our* identity and expression involves a continual process of becoming."[96] Law's story reveals the violence of objectification and categorization represented in the work of trans- artists working with physical culture, like the cut of Cameron's scalpel and the exertion against resistant matter of Cassils's sculpture. At the same time, Cameron, Cassils, and Law also show the work and love of trans-/formation, and not only for trans people; the language of the body that transforms scalpel, camera, clay, and reps into tools of craft and artistry—just as Rothwell's autobiographical writings transform the pain

of posing into theatrical pleasure. In *Dispossession*, Judith Butler extends her ideas of gender performativity to consider the reflexive agency of the fully aware subject who is governed by but nonetheless understands the standards of the gendered form to which they reach. This subject, Butler writes, "will be an 'I' who is already crafted, but also who is compelled to craft again her crafted condition. In this way, we might think the 'I' as an interval or relay in the ongoing social process of crafting—surely dispossessed of the status of an originating power."[97] It is Butler's evocation of the word "craft" here which, in its nineteenth-century form, might be thought of as "work done well for its own sake," and which unites the trans- performances of Cameron, Cassils, and Law with the archive of Stanley Rothwell, a cisgender, straight, white man. Contemporary trans-scholarship, resisting efforts to name "trans" as a category, enables us to also resist the impetus to see "body transformation" in physical culture as a fixed sign; as an ideology written on the body. In this context, Stanley Rothwell and Charles Atlas too might been seen as subjects crafting themselves against political-economic circumstances not of their making; crafting and continually re-crafting norms of masculinity, class, and social role.

Dialectic of the Pose

2017. Uxbridge, London

It's April and I've gone in to see the osteopath on campus to see if he can clear some nagging tightness in my left hip. C. folds my left leg over my right, trying to crack my back. "There's zero movement there," he says. No. "Definitely no way that's moving." The muscles in my lower back are not so much contracted or strained, they're stuck. Each morning I wake up and it's like I live in a different body. Who is this creaky, aging zombie, shuffling to the kitchen to make coffee, hips locked in an askew position in which I've slept? I don't recognize this picture of myself. But when I train, I can work through it, my body remembering old patterns of moving and being before closing up again. When I stretch, I moan. My hips, lower back, quads, refuse to budge. Other people in the gym—weightlifters, bodybuilders, just people getting in shape, glance over in sympathy and moan themselves when they hit a deep pigeon pose or hamstring stretch. We are a chorus of sea lions.

The next day back at the Farringdon gym, I snatch 80 kg [176 lbs] for the first time and feel a kind of freedom at the top of the lift I never have, and then my body immediately closes up again and refuses to cooperate. I stagger off to the showers after stretching perfunctorily, happy with the memory of the lift that nonetheless feels like a completely different person.

The three sites of transformation I have discussed in this chapter have differing levels of evidence of process: absent evidence in Atlas, the ephemeral evidence of Rothwell's papers, and the conscious, performative evidence of trans- performance by Cameron, Cassils, and Law. In the conclusion of this chapter, I turn to the evidence of *my* body. The experience of physical culture that my embodied research brings undermines the comparison photos with which I opened this chapter, escaping the reductive paradigm of the before and after.

As a theater academic and researcher, my colleagues have often been amused by my Olympic weightlifting training. They are unable to reconcile the stereotypically meat-headed practice with my scholarly life. Among friends and family, my training is treated as a curiosity. How can I justify five two-hour training sessions per week? As the journalist and CrossFit devotee Daniel Kunitz points out, "the impulse to overcome yourself, to continually remake yourself in pursuit of a better iteration, is never entirely normal."[98] Although I am a competitive lifter, starting late means that I will never lift extremely heavy weights. I am fit in the sense that I am strong, but weightlifting is also hugely taxing on my body, requiring constant maintenance to keep the muscles and joints mobile and flexible. Since starting I've put on at least 10 kg of muscle, but I don't display the hyper-lean conditioning of some athletes. When others ask me what I get out of weightlifting, the only answer I have is *more weightlifting*. The training—the "formation" of transformation—is its own significance and meaning. It is its own desire and pleasure; work done well for its own sake.

Perhaps the absent evidence of the body in Atlas's archive was there all along, in his system of Dynamic Tension. Dynamic Tension is both a sellable buzzword and an embodied concept. A practitioner holds a muscle or group of muscles in a contracted state before releasing, so that the muscle fibers are torn and rebuilt. The stillness of a Dynamic Tension exercise conceals a tremendous amount of kinesthetic force and energy. The proper name in strength and conditioning science for Dynamic Tension is *isometric exercise*, and isometric holds are common to many fitness programs today (the "plank," for example). "Isometric holds" are also frequently programmed in a weightlifter's training, using a heavily weighted barbell to perform isometric back squats, overhead squats, and deadlifts. In an isometric squat, the athlete pauses the movement of the squat at its most difficult point and holds this pose for ten seconds or longer.

I first encountered isometric holds in the form of a "snatch deadlift with 10 second pause" during the summer of 2016. Though I was quite experienced as a weightlifter by that point, I found that maintaining the body in a position of such stillness was incredibly difficult. To call this a "pause" doesn't capture the effort of the moment, or the euphoric high that follows as the blood rushes through your arteries and you can breathe again. When I first start the program my legs and arms vibrate, uncontrollably.

The only thing not prone to involuntary shaking is my face, locked in a puffed-out grimace. Yet, as I perform successive repetitions of this exercise, my body begins a steady process of adaptation to the unfamiliar sensation and gesture. Minute adjustments of trapezius muscles, attention drawn to the glutes or hamstrings, a flicker in the shoulders that allows me to lock the arms better. These adjustments are akin to what the paleoethnographer André Leroi-Gourhan called *tâtonnements*, or "gropings." Leroi-Gourhan proposed that human behavior was made in a dialectic between the body and its "operating chains" (*chaînes operatoires*) of gestures, or *programmes*.[99] A *programme* is a gestural sequence that is culturally, rather than biologically, determined, though, as Carrie Noland summarizes: "[it] will eventually become anticipatory, suggesting a way to respond to a future stimulus that resembled the one for which it was forged."[100] However, while my minute *tâtonnements*, adapting to the stimulus of the exercise, become increasingly familiar, as I learn the gestural matrix required to perform the lift, the movement never becomes habitual or unconscious. Rather, it is when the lift is mastered—arms locked out, back tight, legs switched on—that I feel most present. When the body is most still, I feel most dynamic. This effort is not directed at any greater purpose, but is only for-itself, my body reclaiming its own time.

Charles Atlas proposed that his system of Dynamic Tension could "make you a new man," just as Stanley Rothwell, in his writings, advocated aiming for physical perfection and the Greek ideal. While physical culture and fitness practices have been and continue to be instrumentalized by any number of ideologies or regimes, an embodied orientation to the archive suggests that while the built body is socially constructed, this process of construction happens only through the participation of an active, agential, embodied subject. Through the process of transformation, the subject encounters a kinesthetic experience that is rarely uniform and sometimes challenges, subverts, or resists the body's social construction. I cannot, of course, speculate on the specific meaning that the kinesthetic experience of Dynamic Tension had for Charles Atlas, or the specific meaning which posing had for Stanley Rothwell. As a cisgender man, I am not positioned to speak to the meaning of physical culture and comparison photos for trans men and trans-masculine, nonbinary people. Instead, I propose a methodological challenge to the historiography of physical culture and body practices more generally. I suggest that we might begin to question the larger narratives through which bodily transformation has been understood. Could it be that in performing physical culture, Charles Atlas was not erasing his immigrant past but using his body to come to terms with it? Or that in taking to gyms and basements, immigrant youth were not resolving the crisis of masculinity but rather "working it out"? Or that by documenting his physique across decades, Stanley Rothwell was resisting his own objectification? Such possibilities, like the moments

between the flashes of the camera in Cassils's *Becoming an Image*, disappear in the darkness, unsaved in the archive. Yet, they can be activated by an approach to history that considers repertoire, gestures, body, and movement, taking the archive as evidence of bodies pushing, pulling, and flexing their environment, situations, and history.

Epilogue: Dad

During my research in the Stanley Rothwell Papers, I had been searching in vain for a living relative of his. Jan and Terry had lost contact with Rothwell's son, Bill, after his donation of the collection in 1986. I had Bill's last address in Norbury, south London, but HM Land Registry showed that the house had been sold to a developer and turned into flats.

On the suggestion of the Stark Center librarian Cindy Slater, I wrote a short article for the Londonist website, urging anyone with further information to contact me.[101] A few weeks later I received an e-mail from Bill Rothwell, who had moved with his wife to Ireland some time ago. We arranged to meet on his upcoming trip to London, and on July 31, 2017, we spent a few hours exchanging stories and information at a wine bar in Victoria.

Bill Rothwell was born in 1944. Unlike his older half-brothers, Jack and Brian, Bill was never interested in physical culture ("Can you imagine, five, six years old, sleeping in a flat full of dumbbells?") but instead was "groomed" by his father to be an artist, and he has painted throughout his life. As we discussed his father's life, Bill began to fill in details that would add complexity to any historiographic work. I learned that Rothwell's achievements in physical culture were greater than his papers demonstrate: he was a bronze medalist in the "Le Plus Bel Athlète du Monde" contest, was runner-up in the 1948 Mr. Universe competition, and was personal trainer to a young Roger Moore. But I was also told stories of physical failure and precarity. Rothwell struggled to find work after World War II, and in 1945 he left his wife and newborn son to take up a temporary contract at a training camp in the Lake District in northern England. At age forty-four he suffered from a crippling case of lumbago that nearly ended his modeling career. Bill admitted he knew very little about his father's physical culture career. Among the pictures Bill gave me, there are several of him as a child boxing with his father; I wondered if Rothwell's younger days as a wrestler and bodybuilder were perceived by young Bill as typically embarrassing fatherly eccentricities.

Before we said goodbye, Bill showed me one more picture of his father. This one I could not keep but could photograph on my phone. The image (fig. 9) shows a very young Rothwell, aged sixteen, facing away from the camera. His hands are clasped below the picture's frame, and he squeezes

Fig. 9. Stanley Rothwell at sixteen. Stanley Rothwell Papers, H. J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, University of Texas at Austin.

his scapulae together, flexing his trapezius muscles, deltoids, and triceps. This was a classic pose of physical culturists at the time. What is striking is Rothwell's surprisingly shy face: his eyes half-lidded and downcast, his mouth betraying no hint of his Cheshire Cat grin. It is a photo of a teenage boy working out what it is to occupy the role of a "man," muscles contracting and groping towards an ideal that can only ever be approximated.

Chapter 3

✦

Strength

Astonishing Feats with Willful Things

2016. Minneapolis, Minnesota

It's November and I'm in the Twin Cities for the American Society for Theatre Research annual conference. When I go to conferences, I've made a habit of seeking out a local gym in whichever city I'm in. Here, it's Los Campeones, an independent gym with two branches. The Seward site, where I spend most of my time, is a huge rough-and-ready gym sprawling across two floors. The ground floor is devoted to bodybuilding, with weightlifting and powerlifting equipment in the basement. On my last day in Minneapolis, I'm in the middle of training when I go to seek out a fractional weight plate, and I turn the corner into a room I've never seen before. I find myself in a green field, filled with perfectly round boulders and vines. It's like a scene from Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream. *I gasp at the image, before this queer fantasyland is pierced by the realization that the green verdant floor is Astroturf, the vines are climbing ropes, and the boulders are Atlas stones. I'd expected gentle Puck to step from behind a stone to greet me. "How now, spirit! whither wander you?"*

Bars, plates, tires, yokes, ropes, frames, clips, collars, benches, dumbbells, kettlebells, sleds: how strange are the magical objects of the physical culturist, raw materials transformed by labor power into commodities that then go to work to transform the bodies of their users. Minnesota is home to the Mesabi Iron Range, located in the northeast of the state, and that region still produces the majority of iron ore mined in the United States.[1] *At the other end of the so-called Rust Belt is York, Pennsylvania, where Bob Hoffman transformed an oil burner business into the world-renowned York Barbell, revolutionizing the sport of Olympic weightlifting at the same time.*[2] *Many of the barbells at Los Campeones bear the York imprint, giving new meaning to the phrase "pumping iron"—iron mined in Minnesota, processed and forged in Pennsylvania, and made into things that men and women in Minneapolis will work out with, laboring yet*

producing nothing besides themselves. Most strength-training products are manufactured in China these days, and Olympic plates are solid rubber surrounding an iron core, connecting American manufacture with a colonial history in Congo, Brazil, and Southeast Asia. Imagining this economic chain reminds us how intimately connected bodily self-making is to the material world.

Los Campeones has been owned, since 2010, by Benjamin Loehrer. Starting bodybuilding in his teens, Loehrer has since competed in powerlifting and strongman competitions. His biography on the gym's website describes transforming a poorly run business into a flourishing hub in four years through hard work and discipline, acquired during his childhood on a South Dakota farm. "Reality taught me responsibility and discipline," Loehrer writes. "I had to work hard and learned to love it."[3] *On Los Campeones's front lawn is a campaign sign for Libertarian candidate Gary Johnson, the only non-Democrat sign in a sea of Hilary. I see this sign and cringe at how it confirms a stereotype.*[4] *The intersection of libertarianism, Ayn Rand's objectivism,* Atlas Shrugged, *and this Atlas of a man is all a bit too on the nose. The association of strength with virile masculinity, and a specific type of right-wing politics, runs deep.*

During my few days in the Twin Cities, I see Loehrer training almost every day, sometimes with friends, sometimes alone, always doing the meat and potatoes of powerlifting: squat, bench, deadlift. At times we are the only two people in the basement weight room. I say hello, but we never have a proper conversation. There's other work to get on with. During one particularly heavy session, Loehrer is surrounded by buddies, who cheer him on as he tries to deadlift an impossible amount of weight. Neck bulging, traps straining, shouting like a madman, he lifts the barbell a couple inches off the ground, but then fails and gives a cartoonish "aw shucks" gesture with his fist. I think about the huge number of times I have failed to lift a weight—this and other stories constituting unwritten histories of attempts that never enter into any official story of physical culture. As different as our politics may be (two days after leaving Minneapolis, I am fighting back angry tears in a bar in Brooklyn as Donald Trump is elected to the presidency), Loehrer and I share a practice, the politics of which are never entirely captured by the symbolic resonance of strength with virility, individualism, and mastery. As much as it is about mastering the material world, sometimes strength training is about feeling the material world act upon you.

Strongman Resurgence

Strongmen are in the zeitgeist again. This is first because strongman performance is popular right now. On March 19, 2022, the professional strongmen Hafþór Júlíus Björnsson and Eddie Hall took to the ring for "the heaviest boxing match in history," an event they had been teasing for the past two years to settle their long rivalry (the match was won by Björnsson in the 6th round). Second, and more unfortunately, the current moment, it seems, is a time of the strongman politician. The most obvious example in 2022 is Vladimir Putin, a man who I suspect isn't actually very strong. "Strongman" simply means authoritarian political leader, and in that sense it is metaphorical, but during the Russia-Ukraine war, ongoing at time of writing, we see the intersection of the strong masculine body with political capacity represented also by Volodymyr Zelensky, who consistently appears in a tight military T-shirt and was filmed getting his Covid-19 vaccination shirtless.

I am a "strength athlete," which means that as a weightlifter I train primarily for physical strength. I began thinking about the intersection of strength and politics from the first moment I picked up a barbell. As someone at the intersection of multiple minoritarian positions, my own participation in strength sports works through questions of my body in relation to difficult associations. Although the spaces in which I have trained are attended by all genders, strength sports, and their antecedent, strongman performances, are a highly visible expression of the Western cultural association between masculinity and physical strength, which stretches back to antiquity. In the minor work *Physiognomics*, Aristotle bluntly states: "Males are bigger and stronger than females of the same kind, and their extremities are stronger and sleeker and firmer and capable of more perfect performance of all functions."[5] Naturalizing feminine "weakness" extended to the subordinate role of women in Athenian society. In ancient Rome, physical strength was a central pillar of *virilitas* (virility), which, though its root means "man" or "male sex organ," is not the same thing as *masculinity*.[6] Alain Corbin, Jean-Jacques Courtine, and Georges Vigarello argue that virility "has been seen as virtue, accomplishment. . . . The virile is not simply what is manly; it is more: an ideal of power and virtue."[7] Virility is "hegemonic masculinity" by other words, an ideal manly role that must be "proven" through feats of strength, athleticism, and violence—for example, in military service and war.[8]

These associations haunt my participation in weightlifting; and it is this tension that drives my analysis of the strongman performances of the past. I am not sure my own experience of these tensions is much different from those of strongmen performers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which, I will argue, worked out anxieties around similar questions in relation to precarious and changing economic and social contexts, on the popular stage.

A Challenger!

I can confidently state that I am, pound for pound and kilo for kilo, the strongest person in the field of theater and performance studies. Check my Instagram for receipts.

This kind of challenge was pretty routine in strongman performances. But before the reader yells "fake" or rises to challenge me, consider the complex and multifaceted embodied practice that underpins my claim. Anyone who has ever done a snatch or a clean and jerk knows that these lifts are not so much about "raw" strength but a complex technique, and crucially, that technique is an interaction between the body and "things"—a barbell, plates, collars, chalk, or in strongman performances, an even more elaborate array of tires, yokes, ropes, frames, benches, dumbbells, kettlebells, and sleds. That interaction complicates the very idea of what "strength" is. My mastery of the physical world is specific and localized to a single situation. In a similar way, theatrical strongman performance complicates the naturalized association of physical strength with manliness, because while a strongman performs the *image* of manly strength, the theatrical nature of the form proposes that there is no objective measure for strength. Like *virilitas*, strength must be proven, through increasingly elaborate and intensifying "feats" in a precarious, theatrical economy of attention. The same performers who invented the ideal of the "strong man" which men were meant to emulate were at the same time defined by their exceptionalism, by the excess of their astonishing feats. The performance, I will argue, was a fantasy about individualism and the nature of capitalist economy at the beginning of the twentieth century, a fantasy that is being worked out today in a subtly different way.

In the first part of this chapter, I explore the performance of strength in Victorian and Edwardian popular performances. I focus primarily on two British figures who represent opposing poles of strength performance: the Welsh strongman Bert Wickham, known for his "motor-cars" act, and the Yorkshireman Edward Aston, who contributed greatly to twentieth-century physical culture and sport via his systematic and "scientific" method of weightlifting. Investigating the theatrical practice of strongmen is complicated by the fact that they did not leave behind detailed rehearsal logs, and their practice was shrouded in secrecy and deception. However, through the analysis of existing archival materials, a picture can be drawn of an exceptionally inventive and creative practice of working with objects on stage. I argue that strongman acts in popular theater articulated a type of mastery that embodied a kind of "undivided" labor—precisely what was contemporaneously disappearing in the working lives of their audiences in the face of industrialization and Frederick Winslow Taylor's scientific management. I then examine two fictional stories about strongmen published in British physical culture media that demonstrate what

this theatrical practice was anxiously working out, including questions of class and racial panic. Finally, I consider the incorporation of strongman and other strength training into modern fitness practices. I argue that strength sports today can be thought of as an apparatus for the circulation of affect. Modern strongman performances index an alternative relation to the material world, where the "ready-to-hand" (Heidegger's *Zuhandenheit*) object reasserts its "thingness" or, to quote Sara Ahmed, its willfulness.[9] By staging an economy in which things feel difficult to master (which is to say, transform, produce, or exchange in commodity form), modern strongmen stage, perform, and work out anxieties over labor, disenchantment, and uselessness in the precarious present.

Who Is a Strongman? Bert Wickham and Ed Aston

In 1907 Bert Wickham, a "powerfully built athlete" of Pembrokeshire, South Wales, performed a "GREAT FEAT OF STRENGTH" at the Bristol Rovers football ground in Bristol, southwest England. He stood between two motorcars, each of "eight-horse power," holding each by a short strap.[10] At Wickham's signal, the cars set off in opposite directions. "The only effect," writes the reporter in Cardiff's *Evening Express*, "was a reddening of Wickham's face, for the cars hardly moved an inch, although the drivers state that both were set at full speed. Then Wickham pulled back one motor, or, at any rate, was only pulled an inch or two by it, for, getting his heel well into the ground, he hung on at an angle parallel with it, quivering in every muscle, but not moving further than stated."[11] Wickham then attempted the same test with "the two cars standing side by side, and pulling in the same direction."[12] Again, the cars did not manage to pull him forward, and the counterforce even managed to break a chain that had been attached to one of the tires to prevent slippage.

The first mention of Wickham's name in the English and Welsh newspaper archives is in 1904, when he accepted the £25 challenge to wrestle the American professional Tom Jenkins (which he did not win). Wickham is described as being 21 years old, six feet tall, 13 stone (182 pounds or 82.6 kilograms), and having a 44-inch chest.[13] He often performed in everyday clothes, including his famous grey sweater. Wrestling was not Wickham's only sport, for he "holds the record for American ball punching, at which he is now giving exhibitions in the London music halls."[14] Later that year, Wickham organized a strangely banal stunt in his home county of Pembrokeshire: a fourteen-mile "Walking Contest."[15] In the music halls, his act consisted of both strongman exhibition and posing (his "marvelous muscular development" was "much admired").[16] His strongman feats included tearing three packs of playing cards, breaking a tennis ball with one hand, "carrying six men on his shoulders," and straightening an iron

horseshoe.[17] These pale in comparison to his feats with motorcars, the first mention of which we find in December 1905.[18] At this first exhibition, which took place at the garage of Mr. T. Gibbon Brooks in Cardiff, he was pitted against two six-horsepower cars.[19] By 1907 he claimed to have pulled against a thirty-horsepower car.[20] His feats gained him the attention of London impresarios. Questioned by a group of experts after his appearance at Hengler's Circus on the authenticity of his motorcar feat, Bert walked them down to Piccadilly Circus, where he grabbed a "random" car and pulled the car to a standstill. As W. A. Pullum writes, "No single event in the whole history of strong man showmanship was ever so brilliantly stage-managed, so highly colored for the Press, or so artistically developed."[21] Wickham's collected car feats are captured in the cuttings of strongman Ottley Coulter (see fig. 10).

By 1911, Wickham's star had fallen considerably. He was reduced to attempting to defraud the manager of the Grand Theatre, Birmingham, with a forged cheque for £3, 10s, a crime for which he was charged.[22] During his arraignment, as the lawyers debated whether Wickham might abscond for engagements in the United States, a little scene played out that seemed to summarize the strongman's plight in the new economy:

> MR. BARRADALE: He will have to find a surety.
> MR. WILLISON: It will be difficult.
> MR. BARRADALE: If he is such a strong man as you make out, there ought to be no difficulty. [*Laughter.*]
> MR. WILLISON: I am talking of physical strength, not banking strength.[23]

Wickham continued to perform for many years after this, though far less frequently, it appears. The last mention we find of a theatrical engagement is in 1914 at the Newcastle Pavilion, and the last mention of any performance at all is at Nottingham Market in 1926.[24] "In the presence of a crowd of several hundred people, Mr. Bert Wickham, known as the Welsh Hercules, gave a remarkable demonstration of his physical powers . . . when he twice successfully essayed the feat of holding two motor cars moving in opposite directions."[25] In 1935, the *Hull Daily Mail* answered a query by a reader about Wickham: "we have no record of his death."[26]

Bert Wickham's motor car feat, like so many strongman feats, has the air of the impossible, but his performances demonstrate the complexity of the craft of strongman, which combined actual strength, athletic technique, showmanship, dramaturgy, stage management, misdirection and sleight of hand, and tampering and fakery. As revealed by William A. Pullum in "Strong Men Over the Years," Wickham's car trick was a fake. Stopping a car onstage, Pullum says, has a bit of a history. It was

Fig. 10. Bert Wickham's Piccadilly Circus stunt, from the Ottley Coulter Collection, H. J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, University of Texas at Austin.

first accomplished by Georg Lettl, who used cars that were "exceptionally light in the rear, thus enabling him to lift them clear of the ground, so that, when the engines were thrown into gear, the back wheels failed to grip the floor."[27] Wickham went one step further, employing the help of theatrical collaborators, who, instead of driving forward, simply reversed slowly. This was finally exposed when the local chauffeur Wickham had hired "at the start of a circuit engagement for which he had angled long and most assiduously . . . jammed his gear lever into one of the forward speeds and went off the stage, right through the scenery and into the wall of the theatre itself, trailing poor Bert himself."[28] Other fakes were simple acts of misdirection. To bend an iron horseshoe, Wickham would throw it offstage in frustration, whereupon an identical, but false horseshoe would be returned to him by a stagehand. Wickham concealed the obvious deception by working the emotions of the audience, who shouted for him to take one more attempt.[29]

Wickham's fakery was laughable, even at the time: his former manager burlesqued the act as "Wert Bickham" in the music halls shortly after his fraud was exposed.[30] However, I suggest that he was not a pathetic or tragic provincial example of the strongman craze. Rather, he was, as Pullum writes, "the exaggeration of an epoch."[31] Indeed, in his outlandish entrepreneurialism, Wickham is perhaps the clearest embodiment of what I will call the strongman's "speculative logic." The Welsh Hercules frequently threw out challenges to the public and other strongmen, backed by real money. While open challenges were a common theatrical practice for strongmen (as well as wrestlers and boxers), Wickham's 1907 challenge took it to another level. He claimed to be "the world's champion athlete" and prepared to match any amount from £100 to £500 to any man who would contest him in *nine* events: "viz., wrestling, boxing, cycling, running, walking, jumping, ball-punching, swimming, and feats of strength."[32] Joshua Buck notes that "open challenges with monetary prizes were common as a way for strongmen to legitimize their claims to strength. The logic was that strongmen would not offer money if there were a chance of losing it."[33] Indeed, there is no record of anyone coming forward to meet Wickham's challenge. The outlandish challenge, underpinned by a large sum of real money, also represents a kind of "financialization of self": speculation in the present on future profits. Wickham was speculating on his ability to generate value in the future in an increasingly saturated market, and an increasingly dispersed economy of attention.

Buck divides strongmen performers into two categories, "lifters" and "fakers," that is, those who were legitimately strong, and those who used tricks and deception to perform feats.[34] In this taxonomy, a faker like Bert Wickham might be contrasted with the weightlifter Edward Aston. Born in Leeds in 1884 (a year after Wickham), Aston's debut came in a match against Max Sick (Maxick) at the Holborn Empire, London, in 1910.[35]

The exhibition was strictly weightlifting, with one and two hands, and was devoid of spectacular tricks. The following year, Aston contested fellow weightlifter Thomas Inch to become "Britain's Strongest Man." As a proponent of "scientific lifting," which he lectured about at weightlifting clubs across the United Kingdom, Aston had a strong influence on the sport of Olympic weightlifting as it is practiced today. He wrote: "Science means quickness and agility, being able to get under a heavy weight instead of pushing it up. Scientific lifting is done as much by the brain as by muscle, and because of this I strongly advocate scientific movements in weight-lifting."[36] Aston denigrated the German performer Lionel Strongfort as a "mere itinerant music hall showman."[37] Were Strongfort to adopt the technique of scientific lifting, however, Aston states, he would be welcome into "the ranks of the B.W.L.A."[38] The B.W.L.A is the British Amateur Weight-Lifters' Association, and the "Amateur" nature of the association suggests what is at stake in Aston's disparaging of the music hall showmen: weightlifting (and by extension, being strong) is an activity worth doing *in itself*, during one's leisure time, and it is cheapened and corrupted by money.

Perhaps, though, Aston and Wickham were not that different. After all, Aston *did* perform in music halls. In a letter to *Health and Strength* in 1914, he writes: "In my entertainment I am introducing some startling novelties for which I am in strict training. I shall also attempt several heavy weight records. . . . Just at present I am uncertain whether or not my engagements will be transferred to the music halls."[39] A contemporary program from the Hippodrome Golders Green (in north London) shows that he was performing in a "Grand Weight-Lifting Competition" alongside acts such as the Sisters Julian ("Duettists and Dancers"), Mozzeto ("One of the World's Finest Jugglers"), and Frank Powell ("Patter Comedian").[40] There is no indication of a challenger for such a "competition," and we might assume that his act consisted of the standard physical culturist repertoire: including "(1) A LECTURE on Common-sense Physical Culture; (2) A Demonstration of the ASTON SYSTEM of Training; (3) A Marvellous Exhibition of POSING and MUSCLE CONTROL."[41] Despite Aston's advocacy of physical culture for its own sake, his use of "scientific" discourse, and his rather sly use of the post-nominal "B.S.M" (Britain's Strongest Man), he was plying his trade within the same theatrical economy of attention as Wickham, using the stage as a means to generate attention and thus value for his mail-order business, which included systems of training and "chest expanders." Aston's weightlifting was also "speculative"; in other words, a risky feat in the present that bets on a return in the future. Thus, I argue that despite being categorically opposed to each other as a faker and lifter respectively, Bert Wickham and Edward Aston both represented theatrical interventions into a new economy, in which certainties about labor, work, and value were disappearing.

Feats and Financialization

The main unit of dramaturgical action in strongman performances is not the scene, but the "feat." The word "feat" comes from the twelfth-century French word *fait*, meaning "action, deed, achievement." *Fait*, in French, carries the related meaning of "fact," aligning the feat with a sense of authenticity. However, from the fifteenth-century "*fait d'armes*," feat also takes on the meaning of "exceptional deed." A feat has the ambivalent sense of being a real deed whose authenticity is put into question by its astonishing nature. As Edmond Desbonnet writes, "the taste of the public for exercises of strength is probably similar to our love for the supernatural; an athletic prowess has, in effect, for our culture something miraculous."[42] In the space of the theater, feats create a precarious and escalating economy of attention, with each feat constantly working to outdo the last in astonishment while maintaining enough reality not to be called out as fake.

This expanding novelty was characteristic of "popular performance," a genre of theater that embraced circus, the dime museum, vaudeville, variety, and the music hall (all places where strongmen performed). As Oliver Double writes, popular performance (1) involves a "direct connection between performer and audience"; (2) "embraces skill and novelty"; (3) is "rooted in the present moment"; and (4) "involves an interlacing of performer and role."[43] These four defining characteristics mean that popular theater performers, far more than actors in the traditional company structure, could embrace the entrepreneurial spirit of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In Britain, the ownership of stocks and shares grew substantially in the period between 1870 and 1935, with economist Leland H. Jenks calling the country "a stock-and-bondholding aristocracy."[44] In America, the period between 1900 and 1930 saw a turn to "financialization" in government and corporate policy, which indicated a wider cultural shift in how risk was perceived.[45] As John Maynard Keynes noted, there was a distinct change in the "mentality of entrepreneurs towards the pursuit of prospective, and even speculative, profit as compared to the mentality of the entrepreneurs in the late 19th century," in addition to the invention of consumer credit.[46] In other words, speculation—wagering the material present for returns in the future—took on greater importance on both sides of the Atlantic. Risk became something to be borne by the individual, for potentially great dividends. In popular performance, we see such individual risk borne by the entrepreneur-artist in the high level of investment and invention in each act, calculated to best capture the attention of spectators.[47]

According to strongman Harold Ansorge, "the difficulty of a feat does not necessarily prove it good for stage work."[48] A feat must have "flash" and "action" in order to draw the attention of the audience.[49] In this sense,

feats of strength resemble "stunts," a related category of performative acts that similarly balance risk, attention, and economy. Kirstin Smith argues that stunts embodied concerns about the financialization of the economy in the nineteenth century, or what Marx calls "fictitious capital."[50] Often performed to drum up interest in a corporation or product, the stunt, she writes, "express[es] both the act *and* the selling machine."[51] The stunt generates value for the company for which it is intended to garner attention, as well as the performer, who through the performance of labor in the present, is able to bet on future work. But such speculation is accompanied by considerable risk. Smith discusses one stunt in which a performer was electrocuted and died riding his bicycle across a live wire, suggesting that stunts embodied a fantasy about financial capitalism: "that precarity could be invited, yet at the same time entirely negated, through the skill of an individual body."[52] In other words, the vicissitudes of the market were acceptable because there would always be exceptional people who could take such risks and win. Strongmen, too, embody ideas of who "should" be exceptional.

The strongmen's feats generated value for the theater owners, who could boast of the best bill in town, while increasing the possibility of future employment for strongmen, who quite literally had to "circulate," plying their trade on a circuit of theaters. The normal engagement in a theater was one week, and there was no guarantee of future work. As Buck notes, the salaries of strongmen in early twentieth-century vaudeville were actually quite high, so the onus was on the performer to make sure his act was memorable enough to be booked again. The best way to ensure repeat bookings was a spectacular finale.[53] Strongmen "challenges" must also be seen in light of this precarious economy, since they functioned as free publicity for the strongman giving the challenge, as well as the upstart strongman who meets the challenge (should he be successful). Wickham's most famous stunts, stopping cars in front of (un-paying) crowds, were unpaid labor that projected toward a future realization as value, in the space of the theater and the paid contract.

Edwardian strongman performance was therefore characterized by an oscillation between enormous risk and potentially huge reward, explaining its propensity for endless novelty and invention. The use of "living weights," that is, using other people as weights, was one such innovation. Living weights increased the mobility of the act on the touring circuit, since the use of audience members was preferable to transporting several hundred pounds of weight for a simple deadlift. They also mitigated against claims of fakery.[54] In a letter to circus strongman and physical culturist Ottley Coulter, George Jowett wrote: "When in New York . . . I was told to do away as much as possible with weights, as the public were fed up on them thru so many fakes, and they like novelty the best."[55] Sometimes innovation resided in the dramaturgy; the arrangement of theatrical

elements. One review of the strongman Maximus, in the *New York Clipper*, illustrates this: first, the apparatus (a dumbbell) is brought onto the stage by three stagehands. Maximus "juggled this dumbbell, raised and lowered it," then "placed it on one end of a springboard, jumping upon the other end of the board and catching the weight as it was hurled into the air." In a final feat, "hanging by his knees from a trapeze, [Maximus] held this dumbbell with his teeth."[56] The escalation of the act masked the initial misdirection, in which the stagehands act as though the dumbbell is much heavier than it actually is. Finally, escalating novelty can be seen in the strongman's use of objects, which ranged from misusing everyday objects, to creating elaborate contraptions (such as "harness lifting"), to the "Tomb of Hercules," a well-known feat since the days of Sandow, in which the strongman would brace a board across his thighs, abdomen, and chest in a bridge position, while supporting stupendous amounts of weight on it, using other people, animals such as horses and elephants, and automobiles. Responding to Ottley Coulter's suggestion to include the feat in his act, Jowett refused, writing, "I never figure on killing myself."[57] While the risk in the Tomb of Hercules is bodily, all forms of strongman acts, including faked feats, involve a level of risk, such as the apparatus malfunctioning or, simply, failing to do the trick properly, which is always possible when techniques are increasingly complex. In exchange for fame and significant monetary rewards, strongmen and women risked exposure as frauds. Strongman performance was therefore born in a speculative economy. But what can we discern from the content of strongman performance, that is, its obsessive invention with materials and objects? In the next section, I turn to fiction for an answer.

2017. Austin, Texas

It's February, and I'm shivering from the air conditioning in the stacks at the Stark Center. Jan is showing me the archive's collection of "things": historical barbells, plates, kettlebells, trophies. Each is labeled with a manila tag and a neat white label. Jan grabs a weight plate with her bare, ungloved hands (can she do that?) and hands it to me. "Notice anything?" I do. The size of the plate suggests 20 kg, but it feels half that. "It's fake," I say. "That's right."

It still feels heavy, though. I wonder if anyone would notice that if they didn't spend hours every week carrying these around.

Props and Tricks

Insofar as strongman performance is "about" anything, I suggest that these performances' inventiveness with materials and objects are spectacles of

mastery over what Ahmed defines as "willful" objects, those that "refuse to provide residence for human will."[58] But these are also anxious spectacles, as demonstrated by their economy of risk and reward, that such patriarchal mastery has already been lost, or worse, that the subject of history, "Man," might himself become an object in an economy of use. After all, industrial capitalism, in which strongman performances circulate, is forged through the violent colonial relation that defines Black bodies as objects of the slaver's will, and defines others who do not meet the descriptive statement of "Man" in a subaltern relation to that will. I now turn to two fictional accounts of strongmen in the theater from fin-de-siècle physical culture media; a 1903 story that illustrates the willful nature of the material world to which the strongman responds, and a 1901 story that, despite its outlandish melodrama, nonetheless communicates a striking racial anxiety. Both stories take a dim view of theater, and in doing so, reveal serious concerns about the nature of the practice.

In the second issue of *Apollo's Magazine of Strength, Skill, and Sport* (July-August 1903), we find the first part of F. C. Hannen-Swaffer's serialized fiction "A Man of Muscle." The serial centers on the theater strongman Iron-Arm, who in the first episode arrives at the Theatre Royal in the town of "Mudborough."[59] It is Christmas time, and with him is his ward, Teddy, a foundling boy that Iron-Arm has rescued from a traveling fair. The Theatre Royal is a miserable place run by the cruel manager Fitzherbert Marlborough, who forces Iron-Arm to do a clown act: "I am to burlesque myself and make mistakes, and then to grin."[60] Iron-Arm is authentically strong, so the burlesque is demeaning, but he decides to go through with it to pay for a Christmas dinner for himself and Teddy. On Christmas Eve, "some scenery" falls on Teddy, and he is killed. The manager forces Iron-Arm onstage, but in his grief Iron-Arm cannot lift even the lightest barbell. The audience laughs at Iron-Arm's failure, believing it to be part of the show.

Hannen-Swaffer's story is anti-theatrical. He describes the Theatre Royal at night thus: "Oh, the misery of the theatre when the puppets have been put to bed and the lights of the candles have died their evil-smelling death!" Theater represents profit-seeking and capitalist illusion; these are anathema to the authentic masculine values of Iron-Arm, who resents falseness, parody, and attention-seeking. The actor-manager Fitzherbert Marlborough here is the speculator, willing to convert the risk of real injury and death into stage-managed fantasy (like the illusion Marx called "commodity fetishism"). When the audience laughs at Iron-Arm's grief, they demonstrate the amoral power of this illusion. However, as I have demonstrated, it was typically the strongman who most inventively devised new illusions. Therefore, Hannen-Swaffer's insistence on Iron-Arm's moral certainty and "real" strength kicks against the strongman's theatrical economy of spectacle and speculation, that is, the very economy on which physical culture was in part based.

In "A Man of Muscle," there are two moments in which the material world asserts its will: the falling scenery (never specified) which kills Teddy, and the recalcitrant barbell that defeats grieving Iron-Arm in the final paragraphs. Sara Ahmed suggests that willfulness is attributed to anything (or anyone) "if it gets in the way of the completion of an action that has been agreed."[61] However, the barbell which, in the final moments, refuses to cooperate with Iron-Arm's will is nonetheless accepted by the audience as part of the spectacle, demonstrating the curious quality of objects in the theater. Theatrical objects are usually called "props," deriving from the term "theatrical property." For Andrew Sofer, an object becomes a prop only when it is in some way moved, transformed, or manipulated by an actor.[62] Stage props are both fictional signifiers and material things, tools to assist the fictional stage action. In other words, props are props so long as they obey the will of the actor handling them—a prop gun that accidentally kills an actor is no longer a prop.

However, barbells, chains, bars, stones, horseshoes, and all other things of strongman performance are a special category, since their incorporation into a fiction *cannot* be too smooth. To a turn-of-the-century audience hungry for novelty, the *value* of the strongman's feat rested on its ability to seem "real," meaning that the best acts resist the theater machine's ability to "ingest the world of objects and signs only to bring images to life."[63] As the director Peter Handke puts it, in the theater "a chair is a chair pretending to be another chair."[64] A kitchen chair from Ikea pretends to be a throne when surrounded by the mise-en-scène and machinery of *King Lear*'s dramatic narrative. The objects of strongman feats do not pretend to be anything other than what they are. Indeed, they reassert their "essential" nature by being misused. Take, for instance, the turn of W. S. Harvey, reviewed in the *New York Clipper* on October 10, 1915. This fourteen-minute act was staged in an "interior" set, a naturalistic bedchamber, in which he appears with his assistant, Madge Anderson. The furniture initially appears as part of the dramatic illusion, which is then vitiated by Harvey's feats: he balances on his chin "all the furniture in the room until he finishes up with a full size brass bed."[65] Upon being misused the furniture seems to reassert its own "will," objecting to its use in the fantasy of the strongman. This is the thrill of the feat, and it was most spectacular and astonishing when there was the possibility of actual failure and injury. On March 5, 1909, the *Clipper*'s vaudeville man breathlessly recounted a performance in which Lionel Strongfort's Tomb of Hercules act with an "automobile filled with people" weighing over 6,000 pounds went wrong. "He was crushed to the ground just as the automobile reached the middle of the bridge, and the settling of the bodies down on the supports at either end was the only thing that saved him from being killed, apparently."[66] The automobile, a machine controlled by humans, overpowers the human *and* the stage fiction. In such moments we feel a frisson, or what Bert States

calls "the shudder of [the object's] refusal to settle into the illusion."[67] Yet, as the *Clipper* writer notes, too risky (or too *real*), and the act would also fall flat: "applause for [Strongfort's] feat was naturally silenced because of the fear that he had been badly hurt."[68] In such moments of danger, strongman objects threaten to upstage the performer entirely, turning the performer into a "meat prop."

Strongman performance in the early twentieth century required a tricky balance: like other forms of popular performance, such as circus acrobatics or stage magic, its success relied on the presentation of an astonishing fantasy of mastery; but this mastery had to retain the possibility of accident or danger. This tricky balance was also an ideological one. On the one hand, the strongman's fantastic transformations of the material world spoke to the growing intensification of industrial capitalism at the turn of the century, when raw materials were turned into commodities by human will. But the strongman also embodied a lost time in which this power was held by the individual worker, during a moment when the will of the worker was oppressed. By the late nineteenth century, the power to transform materials in this manner had been, as Harry Braverman shows, transferred to managers, corporations, and machines via the processes of scientific management.[69] The strongman act thus performed two contrasting, but mutually reinforcing, scripts. On the one hand, it was a nostalgic performance of a value of craftsmanship that was by this time already long gone. On the other hand, it asserted that certain bodies—those meeting the markers of a white, heteronormative, European masculinity—might exceptionally escape the vicissitudes of a newly risky and precarious economy of speculative capital and financialization. This ideological confusion in strongman performance was why fakery was so rampant, and yet its exposure seemed to cause outsized consternation. Fakery could even be a matter for legal arbitration, which is illustrated by an incident in Vienna in 1923 when Siegmund Breitbart exposed the fakery of his rival Erik Jan Hanussen and his assistant Martha Farra.[70] A committee was assembled to evaluate the claims of all three, and eventually they were required to prove their claims in court. Hanussen, a slim stage hypnotist who claimed to use mental powers to achieve his feats, was found to have used fake stone blocks and steel bars in his act.[71] Hanussen was convicted of "theatrical fraud," a crime that would seem to apply to *all* theater.[72] Hanussen's fraud was ultimately about accomplishing a feat/task by means of the mind rather than by true physical strength. The backstage manipulation of the object represented the transfer of control of the production process from the hand to the mind, from worker to manager. The outcry against stage management was greatest when such management was obvious, since it challenged the natural order by which a visibly strong man like Breitbart "should" have power. Thus, the Edwardian performance of the strongman was an entrepreneurial practice of risk that simultaneously traded on a

nostalgia for a faded craftsmanship, represented by an atavistic vision of virile masculinity.

This anxiety was also a racial one,[73] as evidenced by a short story by George Sutton Surrey entitled "Signor Garcia's Strong Man," published in *Sandow's Magazine* in July 1901.[74] In the story, the strongman George Marchant is taken to see a new performer, Vulcanus, who can perform feats hitherto unimaginable on stage. Marchant suspects that Vulcanus is a faker. But upon testing the weights Vulcanus has used, Marchant determines that they are real. Vulcanus really is that strong! After the show, however, Vulcanus's manager, Signor Garcia, is murdered and dismembered by Vulcanus, who is then found drowned in an apparent suicide. Examining Vulcanus's body, detectives are shocked to discover that Vulcanus is not a strongman at all, but is in fact a gorilla in a rubber "human suit." Vulcanus's rubber costume had fooled everyone: Marchant's suspicion of Vulcanus initially turned on the feats themselves. "All of these professional strong men," he says, "can do things which, to their audience, seem wonderful, almost incredible, but they are tricksters, and either their weights are not genuine or they have some mechanical assistance which is hidden from the public view."[75] Yet it is only when Vulcanus becomes violent that the truth is revealed.

The reveal has multiple layers. Surrey's story, while not explicitly mentioning race, nonetheless uses the racist trope of "simianization":[76] the comparison by whites of another ethnic group, often Black people, to nonhuman primates, as in racist caricatures contemporaneous with this short story. It would be easy to compare Vulcanus's circulation within a theatrical and sporting economy to the dehumanization of the African American boxer Jack Johnson, who was represented in the press as "primitive and gorilla-like, in asserting his supposedly innate inferiority."[77] The act of violence at the story's end, therefore, would suggest a continuation of the trope of animalistic dehumanization that was pervasive in the ongoing myths of innate Black athletic superiority. However, it is also significant that Vulcanus turns against his *manager*, the cruel Signor Garcia. This would suggest a white supremacist anxiety over slave revolt, as well as, perhaps, an acknowledgment of the violence of racial capitalism. Capitalism's "wonderful, almost incredible" miracles of strength—which work out ideas of material transformation into commodities—are made possible via the expropriation of the unfree labor of Black people and the indentured labor of subaltern peoples. Marchant initially describes Vulcanus's tricks as "an imposition," deriving from the archaic usage to mean "the action of imposing upon or deceiving by palming off what is false or unreal,"[78] with the further sense of a fraud to extract value from the deceived. Fakery is therefore close to Ngai's definition of the gimmick as a labor-saving device, without, perhaps its aesthetic transparency.[79] While its discussion of the strongman's tricks and gimmicks works out anxieties

about the *exploitation* of the economy of speculative capitalism, in its revelation of a new kind of "trick," the gorilla in a human suit, Surrey's story inadvertently demonstrates, to quote Nancy Fraser, that "the racialized subjection of those whom capital expropriates is a condition of possibility for the freedom of those whom it exploits."[80] Surrey's story reveals the coterminous production of whiteness and the built body, in the context of a practice that is itself an anxious working out of these questions.

Short stories like "A Man of Muscle" and "Signor Garcia's Strong Man"—curiosities of physical culture media that have not attracted the attention of sport historians—can be seen to explicitly work out the questions of labor, value, exploitation, and racialized expropriation that unconsciously underpin the strongman's theatrical practice. However, the purpose of both these stories, as well as other physical culture fiction, is also to consolidate the idea that authentic strength *is* possible, whether represented by Iron-Arm or George Marchant, and to evoke the desire to be strong in the reader. This desire, I argue, is now returning today in the form of strongman training as a contemporary fitness practice.

Performing Strength in the Twenty-First Century

The taxonomy of fitness is traditionally based on what bodies *do*: cardio, strength training, high-intensity interval training, yoga. But we can also think about an alternative taxonomy based on *things,* and how they act upon the body and determine behaviors. Insights from new materialism, actor-network theory, and object-oriented ontology have all prompted a move away from anthropocentric thinking towards questions of the agency of nonliving and nonhuman "objects." Such a view—in which the lifter and barbell are both "things"—shifts our perspective of physical strength away from the unidirectional model of the exertion of force on objects, to a relational perspective, where just as humans make things, things equally make humans and, by extension, the social meanings apparent in our interactions with the material world.

Robin Bernstein proposes the concept of "scriptive things," which, she writes, "like a play script, broadly structures a performance while simultaneously allowing for resistance and unleashing original, live variations that may not be individually predictable."[81] Bernstein suggests that "agency, intention, and racial subjectivation co-emerge through everyday physical encounters with the material world."[82] Things script behavior through *determined* actions, such as the sequential pagination of a children's book, or through *prompted* actions, like a racialized doll made of a specific form of rubber that scripts "broadly violent play."[83] Things in fitness culture, I suggest, are scriptive in a similar sense. Bodybuilding machines, for instance, script behavior through determined actions: the pectoral fly

machine might seem unfamiliar at first, but once your body encounters the machine, measures itself against it, and gets a feel for the movement, there is only one way the action can go. Barbells, dumbbells, Atlas stones, and kettlebells, on the other hand, prompt behavior rather than determine it. The shape of the kettlebell, with its upward-facing handle, prompts the body to grasp it manually, but from there its weight and mass provoke numerous variations. Furthermore, these things also *resist* the action of the performer. A barbell loaded with 100 kgs prompts numerous actions—clean and jerk, deadlift, back squat, front squat—but it also resists, rather than aids, the completion of the action.

As fitness became industrialized (and institutionalized) in the twentieth century, its apparatuses shifted from things that *prompt* behavior to things that *determine* behavior, a shift that broadly correlates to the decline of strongman acts in music halls and vaudeville. Carolyn de la Peña's history, *The Body Electric*, points to the rise of fitness machines and apparatuses between 1870 and 1935. "Many of these objects," she writes, "such as exercise machines and electric belts, appeared in forms typically associated with urban life and industrial production."[84] Moreover, these machines were aimed at augmenting and restoring energies lost through "brain work" (see chapter 4), but they had the further effect of instituting a fitness culture in which the body is subordinate to the machine, as embodied by the global commercial gym, in which the body is told what to do by the machine. The resurgence of strongman performance as a form of training, alongside the growing popularity of other strength sports like Olympic weightlifting and powerlifting, therefore might be seen as a challenge to this state of affairs.

In London, "strongman" is offered as a stand-alone mode of progressive training in at least five locations, including the dedicated venues of City Strongman and Strongman Bootcamp, Genesis Gym, the Commando Temple, and two locations of the Foundry. Additionally, CrossFit Strongman workouts are delivered by numerous CrossFit boxes worldwide, and strongman equipment such as tires, stones, prowlers, and sledgehammers have become common even in mainstream gyms. Daniel Kunitz also points to hybrid events such as the "Strongman Run" and obstacle courses such as Tough Mudder.[85] We might say that strongman, with its almost endless arsenal of creatively misappropriated things, has become a kind of *participatory* theater, with the audience stepping into the role of the strongman.

The spectacle of the strongman, in the Edwardian music hall and vaudeville, I have argued, worked out the latent contradictions of an accelerated twentieth-century industrial capitalism. In the ideology of industrial capitalism, the material world was open to be transformed into commodities, yet the actual reality of this system was highly dematerialized, with speculation and scientific management creating surplus value. The relationship to the material world might therefore be conceptualized via Heidegger's

concept of *das Zeug*, usually translated as "equipment" or "tools."[86] In Heidegger's analysis, tools are objects that exist in a network of other objects and, crucially, human usage. *Das Zeug* are like props in the theater—part of our story. Objects present themselves as ready-to-hand (*Zuhanden*), that is, existing as something we use or know already. The ready-to-hand object is there for us, and it is only when the object breaks down or impedes normal usage in some way that it reveals its presence-at-hand, its being-for-itself. By presenting a spectacle in which things are misused but nonetheless mastered, the turn-of-the-century strongman represented an ideology by which the world of recalcitrant matter could be "property," and furthermore, available to be made into commodities. It was theater in which the subject, through sheer will, masters the world of matter, a fantasy of the (masculine) volitional subject that has been critiqued by post-structuralist thought.[87] Hence, the frequent tampering necessary for such spectacles to take place; in such an intensification of capitalism, who would want the illusion to fail?

Today we continue to be faced with questions of labor and craft, precarity and financialization, though marked by a historical shift to a globalized, post-industrial capitalism in which material labor has not been replaced but rather displaced to the margins of the world. In this context, strongman takes on new meaning. Strongman training has become a participatory practice that courts failure, since failure builds strength. In seeking to train with objects like stones, tires, and yokes, the participants in strongman training are attempting to master the object, but also to experience the feeling of the willful object, the object that resists our use and its place in a network of affordances determined exclusively by human action. In this way, strongman training does not reject the possibility of human mastery but embodies anxiety over it. When we fail to master an object—failing to flip a tire or dropping an Atlas stone—we feel the world act upon us, a moment of disorientation in which we experience the world outside of human action.

To be "willful," Ahmed says, is to resist or disobey what Rousseau calls the "general will" of the social body. To become part of the social body, one must be willing "to acquire a function."[88] Strongman performance, I have argued in this chapter, is about fantasies of the will. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, strongman acts in the theater, whether expertly mastering a lift or inserting a false breakable link into a chain, tried to represent the material world as containers for "Man's" will, including the racialized and physical markers of who was most able to assert their will. At the same time, the strongman's act was thrilling because it was risky, and therefore, in its speculative economy of risk and reward, it anxiously suggested that men in the new economy should be subject to the larger will of the social body, that of an accelerating and financializing capitalism. These questions of the will are still very much alive today. However, by

turning an "impossible" theatrical practice into a participatory practice, modern strongman training might attempt to reassert the willfulness of things. As much as the techniques might be about mastering the material world, they also provide the experience of the material world mastering you. When you pick up (or fail to pick up) an Atlas stone, the agency of that thing is revealed, reasserting that outside the stage-managed world of the theater, objects are not props, and the world of matter has an enchanted life of its own.

2019. Vancouver, Canada

It's September, and I'm lifting weights at a slightly crummy gym off Vulcan Way and Knight St. in Richmond, British Columbia. I'm back home because my dad is dying.

I'm 37 and objectively the strongest I have ever been. I can snatch 90 kg, and deadlift twice as much, I bench 100 kg, I squat 140. I load 2.5 kg more on each side of the bar. I have 30 more minutes, and then I should relieve my mom at the hospice so she can go home and have breakfast.

When I was younger, my dad was my model of masculine strength. I imagine for many men it's the same. My dad was shorter than me, even when I was a teenager, only 5'6", but he seemed huge, barrel-chested, forearms forged by work. He was a mechanical engineer on a factory line. He knew how to take things apart, to craft things, his hands could shape the material world. Fix engines, build things out of wood, cook. But all I knew as a child was his physical power and how much this intimidated me. He was strong, and I, the very opposite of him in many ways, was not. But my dad is now 79 and his body is succumbing to the weakness that all our bodies will succumb to one day. I now understand that what I perceived as physical strength in my father was the symbolic product of our relationship. His true strength was his expertise, his understanding of his particular material reality and how he could change it—and knowing when he could not.

I finish off the squats, shower, and get back in the car.

Chapter 4

✦

Failure and Recovery

The Cross-Contamination of Progressive Overload

Training to failure has been a central principle of fitness since Thomas Lanier Delorme began his experiments with "progressive resistance exercise" in 1944.[1] When a muscle is trained to failure, it grows stronger and larger. While studies in exercise science and physiology have contested the validity of training to failure, it nonetheless remains prominent in the imaginary of fitness culture.[2] Images such as the bodybuilders helping each other through "forced reps," or the powerlifter grinding out a 1RM deadlift and then passing out connect strength training to a heroic, endurance model of masculinity.[3] No fitness practice celebrates performed failure more than the relatively young form of CrossFit. An intense and varied group exercise practice that combines weightlifting, gymnastics, and cardiovascular training, CrossFit reveres pushing the limits of the body. CrossFit has a ritualized performance of failure: as the buzzer timing the "workout of the day" sounds, all athletes throw down their kettlebells and speed-ropes and let their sweating, gasping bodies hit the floor.

In this chapter, I turn from performances in the theater to participatory performances of failure and recovery, in the early twentieth century and the present. I connect the spectacle of groups of bodies collapsing and slowly recovering together in CrossFit to the twentieth-century phenomenon of neurasthenia and the exercise cure. A mainly white male, middle-class American phenomenon, neurasthenia was typically defined as a disease of "weak nerves," with symptoms including headache, fatigue, anxiety, heart palpitations, neuralgia or "nerve pain," and depression. But the epidemiological description obscures the way neurasthenia was also a performance, one that was determined by vectors of race, class, nation, and the transforming industrial capitalist economy of the early twentieth century. As a performance of failure, neurasthenia was cured by physical culture: the exercise cure. In some cases, this took the form of rhythmic group exercises that resembled other physical culture forms associated with nationalism, biopolitics, or "racial hygiene" (eugenics), such as the

German *turnen* (gymnastics) movement and the dance pioneer Rudolf Laban's *Bewegungschören* (movement choirs).[4] Considering neurasthenia as a social drama of failure and recovery, then, I argue that the exercise cure was a form of participatory theater that articulated an aesthetics of what I call "white woundedness," which enabled a performative transformation of failure into success, thus reifying the liberal, individualist masculine subject and his bodily integrity. I call this "*white* woundedness" because nonwhite subjects were structurally barred from participation in such a ritual, and even, as I will show, biologically marked as incapable of developing neurasthenia in the first place. In this way, CrossFit and associated high-intensity interval training (HIIT) group fitness forms, which bear the embodied inheritance of neurasthenia and the exercise cure—in their exercises and equipment, their kinesiological notions of work capacity and overload, and the spectacle of failure and recovery—carry a legacy of racial violence, not (only) in the explicit exclusions articulated by Shannon Walsh,[5] but rather, to quote Arabella Stanger's work on the "hidden violence" of Euro-American theater dance, "in the sense of the histories of social domination that materially underwrite [it]."[6] I explore Theodore Dreiser's unfinished roman à clef, *An Amateur Laborer*, written in 1904, as a vivid example of the social drama of white woundedness. The novel details Dreiser's neurasthenic breakdown in New York City and his recovery through exercise at the sanatorium of William Muldoon, a former wrestler, in White Plains, New York state. The memoir is an autobiographical account of the exercise cure that places this performance in an economic context of accelerating industrial capitalism.

At the same time, the transformed landscape of the dispersed, networked, post-industrial present in which CrossFit emerged also provides openings to resist and trouble the white wounded liberal-individualist subject. In this sense, I follow Colin Counsell's understanding of Laban's *Bewegungschören* as a performance, which, even as it functioned as "the somatic expression of a specific social consciousness," nonetheless postulated alternatives to it.[7] Whereas in previous chapters I discussed "theatricality" as a force undermining the regulation of bodies, here I focus on *relationality* as a positive force produced by the performance of physical culture. Therefore, in the second part of the chapter, I turn to my own autoethnographic and auto-theoretical writing over an intensive period of fieldwork conducted in July 2017 and again in March 2018 at an independent gym in Glasgow, Scotland. I was not recovering from a neurasthenic breakdown, nor was this a sanatorium, but in the course of training daily in CrossFit-style, high-intensity, coach-led group exercise, I performed failure, and recovery, many times. My fieldwork in Glasgow took place in the regenerating industrial quarter of Port Dundas, a canal district that was once Glasgow's heart. Against this backdrop, I explore training together as a form of fluid relationality, in which bodies can act

upon and contaminate the other. In one sense, the gym is an early participant in the area's targeted regeneration. But in another sense, thinking through multiple levels of movement—the internal flows of the body, the improvised negotiations of bodies in space, and the circulation of goods and capital in the industrial quarter—the gym represents the possibilities of bodily practice to invent new lifeways and relations.

Performing Failure

As a child of immigrant parents who believed hard work would result in success, I grew up afraid of failure. Sports were an arena where failure was frequent, humiliating, and deeply embodied. My failure to throw a ball or learn to hockey-stop seemed completely intractable. I couldn't consciously "make" my body succeed at these things. Failing at sports was a clear marker of my subordinate masculinity, since the hegemonic, heteronormative, red-blooded, white Canadian man must be good at sports.[8] Therefore, I avoided sports at all cost. I feared that my failure would be spectacular, that I would make a spectacle of myself, a spectacle of my failure.

Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in theater and performance, there has been a conscious and concerted attempt to *perform failure*. Sara Jane Bailes calls this a "poetics of failure," that is, *doing* failure, a paradoxical state (isn't a completed performance of failure a success?) exemplified by experimental theater companies such as Forced Entertainment and Elevator Repair Service.[9] Failure, she argues, "challenges the cultural dominance of instrumental rationality and the fictions of continuity that bind the way we imagine and manufacture the world."[10] Jack Halberstam suggests that failure is an opening, alternative, or new way of being in the world.[11] Bailes and Halberstam, among others theorizing failure, have conversed with a constellation of artists working through failure in the body (endurance artists such as Marina Abramović), failure in social situations (Daniel Oliver's work on awkwardness), and failure in skills ("amateurish" performances by companies such as the Nature Theater of Oklahoma).

I found these artistic explorations of failure deeply irritating. The idea of sitting through a performance by Forced Entertainment filled me with dread. And why did only white people ever seem to perform failure? In retrospect, it is because the question of failure seemed so deeply tied up with who is *permitted* to fail successfully, which is also to say, who is permitted to recover. Such a capacity is, in contemporary neoliberal society, unevenly distributed along fault lines determined by race, class, gender, and sexuality, even as neoliberalism's badly mangled version of Samuel Beckett dictates that we must all "fail again [to] fail better." As Jonathan Joseph notes, the discourse of resilience under neoliberalism shifts responsibility

onto individuals to make them accountable for their own failures and their ability to bounce back, a discourse that resonates deeply with Jennifer Smith Maguire's discussion of the ideology of fitness.[12] Thus, failure as a biomechanical process—that is, the process by which muscle is torn down and rebuilt, and the organism's work-capacity increased—is inextricable from a neoliberal discourse of failure. Resilience is not a quality that all people can develop equally. Some bodies—people of color, women, queers, disabled bodies—are excluded from the start. Failure and recovery, the building blocks of bodybuilding "bro-science," under this lens cannot but seem imbricated in a political-economic system in which many are left debilitated, in a persistent state of failure, while others get to succeed, facilitated by structural advantages that persist despite the individualizing discourse of resilience.

The Nervous Whiteness of CrossFit

At time of writing, the official CrossFit map shows 13,978 locations worldwide, in more than 120 countries.[13] However, CrossFit is not a chain of gyms, but a branded type of fitness training, created by founders Greg Glassman and Lauren Jenai in 2000. Gyms, or "boxes," affiliate with CrossFit, licensing the name and undergoing their training certification. A CrossFit workout might draw from gymnastics, bodybuilding, Olympic weightlifting, and strongman. Its broad definition is: "constantly varied functional movement, executed at high intensity, across broad time and modal domains."[14] This varied, functional approach makes CrossFit inclusive (one can adapt or "scale" the workouts according to one's ability or impairment) and open to a high level of invention and agency.

CrossFit's vision of the world, J. C. Herz writes, suggests that "life, the universe, could swerve in unexpected ways and make daunting physical demands, [so] that your survival or success might at any moment hinge on your ability to move your body and some kind of heavy load over distance quickly."[15] In other words, it is a training for a precarious present. As the sociologist Leslie Heywood argues, CrossFit's neoliberal precepts of self-improvement and individualism undermine its other benefits.[16] Other researchers have pointed to CrossFit's "performative regulation" and the "panopticon"-like nature of its mutual surveillance.[17] For non-participants, CrossFit can seem like a cult, which is perhaps why it has garnered as much criticism as plaudits.

CrossFit's discursive universe is littered with words and phrases like "buy-in" and "cash-out"; the language of economy, work, and investment. Participants will talk about "putting the work in." A coach will scream "let's get it done!" like the worst line-manager in the world. A WOD (workout of the day) is task-based and focused on improving one's work capacity

(mass moved) over time. In weightlifting, one aims to lift more weight by improving technique and increasing strength, and sessions can stretch to two hours or more. By contrast, a CrossFit participant aims to complete the tasks in the WOD and then clock out. CrossFit injects the language of work into one's leisure time, transforming one's recovery *from* work into a space for *more* work. In a WOD, participants are given a short time limit to complete a huge amount of "work," which alternates heavy muscular exertion (strength) with cardio stress (endurance), thus taxing all three of the body's fuel systems (adenosine triphosphate or ATP, carbohydrates, and oxygen). The goal, in other words, is to "max out," or work to failure.[18] But participants also *perform* failure, often dramatically and theatrically. As the last seconds of the timed workout of the day tick by, the participant pushes herself harder to complete the task at hand within the allotted time: kettlebell swings, thrusters, wall balls, 200 double-unders on the speed rope.[19] The reserves of the body, depleted by the preceding nine minutes of intense work, seem to replenish themselves, magically, as the last few movements of the task are performed. As the buzzer sounds, the participant throws down both her tool and body onto the floor. She lies, unmoving but for the rise and fall of her breath, watching the steam rise in the unheated industrial space.

In the factory, the worker who performs "being overloaded" is the worker who cannot cope with the load. When overload is individual it is heard as complaint, a marker of *you* as a problem.[20] It is *your* system that is overloaded, and not the system *you are in* that overloads you. When overload is shared it can become strike, refusal. But under neoliberalism, performing "being overloaded" can be a performance of resilience. How are you? *Overloaded with work, crazy busy. I have so many e-mails it's insane. This year I'm going to learn to say no.* But if you are actually overloaded and unable to function, you become a problem for Human Resources and occupational therapists. To submit to the pleasures of overload in this context feels subversive.

I could leave it here; follow the thread—CrossFit is resistant and subversive like the performance of failure is resistant and subversive. Yet in the three cities where I have done CrossFit (London, Vancouver, and Glasgow), I had the same disquieting questions: who can fail, and who can recover? I found myself disquieted by CrossFit's *whiteness*. In 2013, the National Public Radio reporter Gene Demby (a CrossFitter himself) noted the public perception that "CrossFit culture is, if not hostile, then at least unwelcoming to people of color."[21] While individual boxes might be ethnically diverse, the high cost of entry (in the United States this might be upwards of $200 per month) means that "people of color, who are more likely to face economic barriers to exercise," may be less likely to join.[22] Combine this with CrossFit's uncritical celebration of the police and military and the lack of diversity in the CrossFit Games (unlike bodybuilding or weightlifting, the top athletes are all white), and CrossFit's

whiteness begins to seem overwhelming. The performance of the chiseled, sweaty, battle-scarred white male body is a "survival" aesthetics of white masculinity, which is made extremely visible in the Instagram accounts of top athletes like Rich Froning. Photo after photo presents ripped and jacked white male bodies, not dissimilar to the bodies of fitness models, but sweaty, exhausted, and red-faced after a workout, often with visible scars and bruises and dark circles under their eyes indicating depleted systems. This aesthetic is reminiscent of Fred Pfeil's discussion of 1980s white male action heroes (such as Bruce Willis's John McClane) who are "simultaneously displayed as beefcake and mortified as beef."[23] It is the performance of the resurrected and invincible white male, who transcends the flesh through constantly varied movements.

CrossFit's embodied aesthetics of wounded white masculinity can be traced back to the history of neurasthenia and the exercise cure. While the phenomenon of neurasthenia has been examined as a gendered crisis in response to industrial transformations at the turn of the twentieth century, I propose that Thomas Delorme's idea of progressive overload, a lesser-known concept from exercise science, transformed this crisis of work and class into an entrepreneurial narrative of (white) failure and recovery that continues to be realized in CrossFit today.

Neurasthenia and the Exercise Cure

A Latinate portmanteau word meaning "nerve weakness," neurasthenia was defined by the American physician George M. Beard in *A Practical Treatise on Nervous Exhaustion (Neurasthenia): Its Symptoms, Nature, and Sequences* (1880), *American Nervousness: Its Causes and Consequences* (1881), and *Sexual Neurasthenia* (1884). Typically thought of as a "fashionable" diagnosis of the late nineteenth century, and superseded by twentieth-century psychiatric cures, neurasthenia's wide array of symptoms acted as a kind of catch-all for any sort of masculine *disease*. Its symptoms could include "blurred vision, indigestion, restlessness, backache, constipation, disorientation, headache, throat irritation, colds, dizziness, loss of appetite, palpitations, and spitting up blood."[24] The most common symptoms, however, were "insomnia, tension, depression, and (especially) fatigue accompanied by an utter lack of energy."[25] Accordingly, contemporary scholars have been inclined to consider neurasthenia less as a physiological phenomenon than as an assemblage of cultural and political anxieties at the turn of the century. Following Kélina Gotman's crucial reading of "choreomania," the dancing disease, we might consider neurasthenia as a discursive "zone of intensity"; that is, "a complex of ideas and events, a temporary holding zone in which concepts in formation overlap with one another, associating with adjacent concepts."[26]

Neurasthenia was a threat to the rigid male order, as well as an opportunity for its reconstruction. *Hysteria* was the original catch-all diagnosis for "a multiplicity of morbid phenomena" affecting white middle-class women in the nineteenth century.[27] In 1872–73, Jean-Michel Charcot expanded the diagnosis of hysteria to include men; however, unlike hysteria in women, which was supposed to result from "overwhelming emotional experience," this new *hystérie virile* derived from physical trauma, usually at work.[28] Here, we begin to see neurasthenia's connection to an emerging Fordist economy of labor and leisure. E. Anthony Rotundo points out that neurasthenia was caused by too much work, leading to chronic exhaustion.[29] However, because neurasthenia was primarily a disease of the middle class, it was supposedly caused by an excess not of manual work but of "brain work" draining the body's nervous energy. It thus confirmed a hierarchy of labor (with mental labor at the top), while simultaneously providing an excuse for the increasing leisure time enjoyed by the middle class because of Taylorist scientific management and automation.

Neurasthenia was based upon a nineteenth-century thermodynamic model of the body that would become increasingly outmoded with the discoveries of the twentieth century. In the thermodynamic model, the body is conceived as "a closed system containing a finite amount of energy."[30] The nervous system's breakdown in neurasthenia thus results from *overexpenditure*, hence Beard's less discussed anti-masturbation advice in his 1884 *Sexual Neurasthenia*. Related to the Victorian notion of "spermatic economy," Beard argued that masturbation depleted vital male energies, and thus "men could be considered responsible for their own insanity."[31] "Masculinity" is figured as a substance that can be depleted, providing an apt, if messy, metaphor for anxieties over the changing status of men in society. This fluid mechanics model of gender is echoed today in the antifeminist, men's rights activist discourse of Reddit's "NoFap" anti-masturbation community: "NoFap is about regaining your manhood. And that's what attract [*sic*] the women."[32]

Female hysterics were prescribed a "rest cure," but male neurasthenics were prescribed active, virilizing cures: outdoor holidays and exercise.[33] Nicholas Turse notes that exercise cures for neurasthenia became popular from 1909 onwards, and even Sandow himself wrote about his own struggles with neurasthenia in *Life Is Movement* (1919).[34] Sandow uses what Turse calls a language of "biological economics," including terms such as "diminishing nervous income" and "health-capital."[35] This language of input and output, income and expenditure, appearing in 1919 after the end of the First World War, demonstrates the great influence of neurasthenia discourse upon physical culture in the twentieth century. Unlike the enforced confinement of the rest cure, physical culture as cure was an active process, a practice of bodily movement, a choreography, that enabled men to perform an embodied subject who fails and then recovers.

Theodore Dreiser at William Muldoon's Sanatorium

Theodore Dreiser's *An Amateur Laborer*, written in 1904 but unpublished until 1983, is a striking document of neurasthenia and the exercise cure, and the ambiguous and multiple valences of the connections between the economic model of the body and the transformations in modern work. The novel begins with Dreiser in a depressive state of anxiety and insomnia, brought on by the commercial failure of his previous novel, *Sister Carrie*.[36] Dreiser cannot write. Suddenly "as if by a stroke, I found myself bereft of the power of earning a living with my mind and was compelled to turn to my hands. These had never been trained in any labor."[37] The first part of this three-part novel unfolds as a repetitive, relentless phenomenology of failure. Again and again, Dreiser goes out to find work and returns unsuccessful. In one scene, he stands in line with other manual laborers, but feels himself an impostor. Surviving on a diet of bread and milk, he loses weight. When he finally plucks up the courage to ask for manual work, each attempt is rebuffed: "People did not like my appearance. They seemed to take it for granted that I was physically unable to do anything and passed me by."[38] Down to his last dollar and fifty cents, he is saved by a chance meeting with his brother Paul, a successful Tin Pan Alley songwriter, who gives him money and packs him off to a sanatorium, run by the retired wrestler and physical culturist William Muldoon.

Muldoon is described as a "very powerful man, magnificently developed, who looked as handsome as Hercules in his riding breeches and tight-fitting coat."[39] The occupants of Muldoon's sanatorium are charged fifty dollars a week to board there (a fortune compared to the wretched poverty Dreiser has suffered). The rest of the boarders are "all comfortable-looking souls of from twenty to forty years of age with a manner so suggestive of place and possession that it was almost obnoxious."[40] Dreiser is reborn as a social being in the semi-comic scenes of training, eating, and bathing that follow, although he is at first a skeptical and reluctant participant: "the fact that men would take sure [i.e., harsh] treatment and pay for it was an amazing thing to me. . . . How much more preferable it would be if they would go out and work."[41] Dreiser's skepticism exhibits anxieties about the transformation of work and industry at the turn of the century. Written five years after the publication of Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), *An Amateur Laborer* places the physical culture cure into the liminal space of "conspicuous leisure." Like conspicuous consumption, conspicuous leisure is fundamentally concerned with social distinction through the expenditure, or "waste" of goods in a manner that does not contribute to the production process.[42] For Dreiser, who is attending the sanatorium to build up his nervous energy, his fellow patients seem to be indulgently wasting theirs—hence his listing of the other men's luxuries (a horse, a yacht, an automobile, and "soubrettes").[43]

It pains him that he is among those who control the labor of others, when he should be out in the world, himself laboring.

What's more, Muldoon's regime is presented as Marie Antoinette play-acting of the actual work-and-time transformations of modern industry. For example, bathing:

> He explained to me that I had but one minute to take my bath. Ten seconds in which to jump under the spray and get myself thoroughly wet, twenty seconds in which to jump out and soap myself over, ten seconds to get back under again and rinse all the soap off, and twenty seconds in which to retch and dry the skin. . . . "Begin with your feet," he said. "Wet your left foot. And leg. Now your right. Wet your right. Now your chest. Let the water run on your chest. Now your back."[44]

Dreiser's body resists the instructions, in spite of his will: "Like a child being directed by a mother I followed these injunctions as quickly as I could, but I could not do it as he wished."[45] His willful body, then, betrays the uncontrolled, spontaneous movement that is itself part of the neurasthenic diagnosis, and which must be disciplined in the exercise cure.[46] Exercise with heavy medicine balls, too, is an embodied "art," with Dreiser emphasizing the difficulty of the technique to be mastered. During these sessions Muldoon turns terrifying: "his rage seemed to be enormous, and he would threaten to tear your very soul out."[47] Dreiser's resistance to Muldoon's program represents a transformation of masculinity and individual responsibility, which is demonstrated in an exchange between the two men while they are out riding. Dreiser explains that he believes Muldoon's strength to be inherited, rather than the product of exercise. In a surprisingly poetic passage, Muldoon replies:

> "I've worked for what I have. I've exercised. I've carried halves of beef as a porter, and unloaded tons of ice as a stevedore in my time. I've danced naked in the open air in December, when I was in the army, in order to dry myself, and keep clean when I didn't have a towel, or a way to wash my clothes. I could have gone dirty and lived but I didn't want to. I wanted to exercise and be strong and I was strong."[48]

But for Dreiser, it is even this "want," the *will*, that is inherited: "Have you any idea what made you want to?" Dreiser, a literary naturalist, is interested in exploring the way social forces determine men's behavior.[49] Muldoon's sanatorium represents another way of thinking: that the body and the strong, masculine subject can be built *outside* of the social roles to which that body is born.

After leaving the sanatorium and taking a menial job on the railways, Dreiser finds that the actual labor he was longing for, labor where he is paid fifteen cents an hour, is nothing like the unproductive vital energy of sport. The other workers remind him of "automatons."[50] Throwing medicine balls may have been a burlesque comedy, but it had a positive effect on Dreiser's health. Hauling sacks of sawdust, on the other hand, is destructive: "A sharp pain shot across the muscles of my back and down my legs."[51] Thus, while the exercise cure is laborious, it is not labor. In the memoir's move from labor to leisure to labor, Dreiser articulates both the liminal nature of physical culture as well as the anxieties about its emergence in relation to a rapidly transforming economy. Dreiser worked on the railroad only for a short time, but wrote about his experiences in several published works thereafter. As Jennifer Travis writes: "Railway injuries helped Dreiser add an innovative vocabulary to the culture of masculine re-embodiment; not only did men like Dreiser seek medical cures for psychological injuries, but many also began to articulate legal claims about their psychic wounds." Injury, she argues, went from something to be avoided to something "constitutive of masculinity itself."[52] Through his railway experiences, Dreiser discovered that "woundedness did not necessarily exclude manliness" and in fact was the pathway for recovery.[53] I want to suggest that the psychodrama of masculinity in failure and recovery is also choreographed through the biomechanics of exercise, which were being experimented upon at the time.

Progressive Overload: Overcoming the Thermodynamic Body

The constitutive nature of the social drama of failure and recovery for white American masculinity is shown in the experiments in exercise science of the early twentieth century. As Carolyn Thomas de la Peña argues, American men saw neurasthenic failure as an opportunity to experiment with augmenting their masculine energy through "strange machines" and quack cures like "radium waters."[54] But the physician Thomas Lanier Delorme supplied the most convincing scientific and biological answer to the fin-de-siècle ideological question of energy enhancement, with his principles of progressive resistance exercise. Commonly known in bodybuilding and fitness culture as "progressive overload," the theory was formulated by Delorme at the Gardimer General Army Hospital in Chicago, where he had taken up a post in 1944 tending to hundreds of wounded soldiers. Looking for ways to ease the pressure this placed on hospital staff, Delorme set about applying principles from his own pastime of weightlifting to rehabilitation. As Jan Todd, Jason Shurley, and Terry Todd describe, Delorme experimented on a patient and friend, Sergeant Thaddeus Kawalek, who was recovering from a knee injury.[55] Kawalek performed exercises using a pair of "iron

boots," a popular physical culture apparatus, and "recuperated much more quickly than normal patients at Gardiner who'd had similar knee surgeries; he not only regained full use of the leg, he could even run again."[56] Delorme's experiments normalized strength training as part of public health.

Progressive overload holds that the human body grows stronger when forced to adapt to a tension beyond what it has previously experienced. Taken to its logical conclusion, progressive overload has dark implications, suggesting that the human body can withstand unlimited demands so long as those changes happen little by little. In essence, a physiological prescription for restoring function to a body part (enabling the injured soldier to return to his function in the corps/body of the army) was also a tool for endlessly improving functionality. In this light, "fitness" comes to be seen as a much longer-term part of the logic of acceleration that the philosopher Paul Virilio suggests organizes the world of modern industrial capitalism.[57] This idea is echoed in Greg Glassman's "three-dimensional" definition of fitness.

> Health can . . . be concisely and precisely defined as increased work capacity across broad time, modal, and age domains. Work capacity is the ability to perform real physical work as measured by force × distance / time (which is average power). Fitness is this ability in as many domains as possible.[58]

In other words, CrossFit defines fitness as an individual capacity for work that can be improved forever.

The *rhythmic* nature of CrossFit—repetitive action counted out in rounds, under the gaze of the countdown clock—resembles the work and time experimentation of the German dance pioneer Rudolf Laban. Working alongside the English business consultant Frederick C. Lawrence in the 1940s, Laban's research attempted to address the problem of demotivation in Taylorist scientific management. Because the tasks of Taylorist work were so small and repetitive, workers experienced a sense of alienation from their labor. Laban instead attempted to choreograph *flowing*, rhythmic movements, which optimized internal motivation or "effort." As the dance scholar Katja Rothe notes, a rhythmic task created worker "self-direction" and job satisfaction, reducing the need for disciplinary or punitive practices. She writes: "rhythmic movement was a direct regulation of motivation and thus of productivity."[59] Similarly, a body performs a WOD by learning to manage the task, regulate its rhythm, and direct and control its flows of energy. An athlete counts out reps in 5s, 10s, and then rests, recharges. This is how the athlete divides the task, and time. In other words, like the locks of a canal, the body begins to regulate its flows and effluvia. The managed bodies of the best CrossFit athletes work at full capacity, with their ATP, anaerobic, and aerobic systems working together like the networked logistics of the port, canal, and railway in the nineteenth century.

Wounded Whiteness and Entrepreneurial Fitness

The genealogy I have sketched above demonstrates how the formation of the entrepreneurial, self-managed subject of American industry was accompanied by a drama of failure and recovery that played out in the body. This drama was implicitly and explicitly a racial one. As many historians have noted, neurasthenia was already a racialized diagnosis. Gail Bederman shows the link to white supremacy: "only white male bodies had the capacity to be truly civilized. Yet, at the same time, civilization destroyed white male bodies."[60] Brad Campbell details the "racist assumptions" in Beard's seminal tract, *American Nervousness* (1881), which describes the physiognomy of the neurasthenic, using coded racialized references to "thickness of the lip" and irregular nose size.[61] The ideal physiognomic type of neurasthenic that Beard described was "the class of patients he saw and treated in his private New York neurological practice: white, wealthy, urban Northerners, primarily men of the brain-working class."[62] In other words, "[Beard] found a way, through neurasthenia, to lend scientific credence to and provide a biological basis for the social position and political ideologies of the white American upper classes."[63] Campbell connects the etiology of neurasthenia to the "racial immunity" discourses of the pre-Civil War nineteenth century that sought to legitimize slavery.[64] In a similar way, Warwick Anderson notes, the phenomenon of "tropical neurasthenia" suffered by colonial officials in the American colony of the Philippines was a way for such officials to "render their experience in the Philippines generically white, manly, and resolute," and recuperate a "masterful colonial identity."[65] But neurasthenia was not merely a "white diagnosis." Rather, the technologies of *recovery* to which it gave rise enabled white middle-class men to perform the transformation of failure into success, if not in business and finance, then in the body.[66]

Kyla Wazana Tompkins notes a similar biopolitics of race, illness, and health in her analysis of advertising pamphlets for Swift's Specific Tonic, in the 1890s. The pamphlets feature on one side of the page a cartoon of a racist black caricature named Uncle Balaam, who suffers from "biliousness." When the white consumer turned the page, they were confronted with a multitude of testimonies of white consumers with terrible symptoms who had used Swift's Specific Tonic and recovered fully. Tompkins argues that "the motile discourse of illness in these pamphlets allows the white consumer to produce the pleasurable fiction of threat at any moment, facilitating the performance of a grotesque and melodramatic victimhood, which itself functions as a sign of access to forms of white racial privilege."[67] The juxtaposition of testimony with racist caricature allowed consumers to "turn the page" on illness. While the black body of Uncle Balaam never recovers, "the pamphlets script whiteness as recuperable,

even transformable."[68] If this narrative of white woundedness and recovery can be located in the late nineteenth-century marketplace of tonics and specifics, it persisted in the turn-of-the-century practice of the exercise cure, and through the exercise science of progressive overload, into the trope of the "hardened white man who finds healing in wounds."[69] It also persists today in CrossFit. The celebration of white, wounded bodies in the CrossFit journal, on Instagram, and in the Reebok-sponsored CrossFit Games, bodies that have been made fit through a drama of failure and recovery, relates to an exclusionary structure that stretches back to the white supremacist and settler-colonialist founding of the United States. CrossFit is open to all. Nevertheless, it replays a choreography of recuperable whiteness (or *white recovery*), in the face of failure.

Having spent time in the field in CrossFit boxes in four different cities in three different countries for this project, I have never felt unwelcome as a person of color. But it is worth considering how certain aspects of CrossFit, in addition to its celebration of the military and police, and its extremely high price of access, might be felt as exclusionary to people of color. I am pointing to a failure in the culture of CrossFit to directly address the structural politics of debility and access that played out in the drama of neurasthenia and the exercise cure but which colors access to health and "fitness" in the present. Who can afford to train to failure when they work for the minimum wage, or if their getting injured meant getting fired? The question of who can afford to be wounded in order to recover is increasingly urgent in a precarious, neoliberal economy in which, as Jasbir Puar has argued, the distinction between a capacitated population and a debilitated one, which is to say a population to which a kind of "slow death" is structural and endemic, is highly racialized.[70] Furthermore, Puar suggests, "in neoliberal, biomedical, and biotechnological terms, the body is always debilitated in relation to its ever expanding potentiality."[71] The body can always be better, work harder, and recover from anything. This "ever expanding potentiality" was given scientific credence by Delorme's progressive overload; and it is that at which Glassman's definition of fitness aims, thus its claim that "the program prepares trainees for any physical contingency."[72] But who has access to such potentiality—in other words, who can run from debility—is determined by a larger structure of race, gender, and economics.

Recovering in Port Dundas

The historical movement articulated in this chapter so far does not, however, negate the specificity of new lifeways and relations invented through the cross-contamination of embodied practice. In the second part of this chapter, I put the history of performing failure in physical culture into dialogue with the present, local, and specific: a single independent gym

in Scotland. In July 2017, I spent two weeks in residence at a gym called Everyday Athlete (EDA), an independent gym in Glasgow, Scotland. This wasn't an ethnographic field visit, exactly, but rather an opportunity to learn and share practice with the team. I first contacted Tommy Young, one of the EDA owners, through the sociologist Sue Scott, who mentored the early phases of the project that would eventually become this book, and importantly, was willing to share the number of her personal trainer. Tommy had just returned from Beijing, where he had worked for a year, and was in the process of setting up a new gym with two other business partners, John (Valbo) and Paddy. The gym opened on March 17, 2016. Alongside the owners, two other personal trainers, Martin and Terence (T), make up the core coaching team. Tommy, Paddy, and Martin are former professional Muay Thai fighters; T comes from wrestling and jiu-jitsu, and Valbo from bodybuilding. While EDA teaches Muay Thai classes, most of their business is in CrossFit-style coach-led workouts, although they have chosen not to affiliate with the official CrossFit brand. EDA emphasizes shared, intense exercise, whether this is in classes or in personal training, where the trainer will often do the workout alongside the client. The highlight of the week is FYF, or "Fuck You Friday," a 90-minute metabolic conditioning workout. Nearly twice as many members come to FYF than to any other class. The gym has a diverse client base and the community bond is strong—as Valbo points out to me, you will almost never see anyone wearing headphones, even when training on their own. During my first visit to EDA, I trained twice daily in CrossFit and Muay Thai, and taught weightlifting to the coaches. I went dragon boating with EDA in the first annual Glasgow Canal Festival, and we drank beer and ate street food at a warehouse in Govan. Since July 2017, I have made a further trip to train and to run a physical culture/applied theater workshop with the local artist David Banks, targeted at vulnerable young men in the Paisley area.

What follows is not a sociological study, but rather a piece of autoethnographic writing intended to capture a polyvocality of lived experience, located in the embodied space of intense training and performing failure. I call the fluid relations I witnessed in the EDA gym's space *lateral sociality*—a relation of affecting and being affected by the other, that exists outside of face-to-face encounters and other traditional markers of intimacy.

2017. Glasgow, Scotland

It's July, and I'm in my second week at EDA when Tommy asks, "You coming Saturday?" pointing to the sign-up sheet at the front counter of EDA.

"Sure," I respond. Two days later, I'm in a dragon boat on the canal in the pouring rain as part of the gym's impromptu team. I'm the only person

with any experience of dragon boating, meaning I've done it once before, but the gym has a fighting spirit, and more than anything they want to beat their landlords (the team from Scottish Canals) as well as the team from the CrossFit box in central Glasgow, who are all strapped up with GoPro cameras and raring to go. In the end, the EDA teams wins and is awarded a trophy, some medals, and a bottle of champagne, which Tommy explodes over us during the awards ceremony.

(I'm aware of how ejaculatory this image is. It's not unintentional. Fluids were everywhere in Glasgow—the Scottish rain, the water in the canals, the generosity with which EDA laid on drinks, the sweat that poured in every session, and David vomiting on his shoes after FYF. "Fluid" is a physical description as well as a theoretical principle, a marker of the uncontrollable, running counter to the dry, controlled masculinity of those male neurasthenics and no-fappers described earlier. Anyway.)

During the prizes, a local councillor whose name I can't recall gives some background about the targeted regeneration of Port Dundas. "The canals were the veins and arteries of Glasgow and the water was the lifeblood of Glasgow's industry, but as you know, they've been derelict since the 1930s. So this festival is the first step to bringing them back to life, making this a place people want to come to." The festival brought people together for food and drink, but for the most part, the aim was to showcase activities: parkour, capoeira, skateboarding, and dragon boating. What does it mean for people to come from all over Glasgow to practice things in this liminal, transitional space that is as yet undeveloped? The ruins of post-industrial capitalism have proved a fecund ground for this multi-generational community of practice, a community that means a great deal to its members ("It's more like a wee family," L.P. says). What happens when this space is developed?

Managing Flows

Port Dundas was the terminus of the Forth and Clyde Canal in the late eighteenth century. The canals facilitated the transit of Scottish goods, which made Port Dundas the industrial heart of the city. By the twentieth century, shifts in British production and the increasing importance of the railways and motorways led to the canals' decline, and by the 1930s they were disused and the surrounding warehouses derelict. Port Dundas was effectively abandoned throughout the twentieth century. Until very recently, there were almost no residential buildings in the area—it was an abandoned site overlooked by massive council-owned tower blocks, a physical reminder of Glasgow's industrial decline. In the early 2000s, a targeted campaign by several organizations led to the regeneration of the canals for leisure activities.

Walking back home each night along the canal, I think about circulation and flows in urban space, and their relation to working out and controls of the flow of energy in the body. In what way might the labor of self-making (and unmaking) be connected to the social processes of urban regeneration? Like many independent training gyms or CrossFit boxes, EDA's choice of site was driven by the need for large but affordable real estate. The takeover of empty industrial space for leisure activities might easily be read as participating in processes of gentrification, or as a symbol of industrial decline. But the industrial location of such sites can also prompt us to read CrossFit and similar forms of intense exercise as "rehearsing" forms of community and relation that might exist momentarily outside advanced capitalist labor relations.

The canal/lock system was invented to regulate the force of water, to discipline river and sea. But it was superseded not by the flows it aimed to control, but by the flows of capital itself, that is, the progression of nineteenth-century industrialization, and twentieth-century post-industrialization. In his short essay "Postscript on the Societies of Control," Gilles Deleuze summarizes the aim of the disciplinary society: "to concentrate; to distribute in space; to order in time; to compose a productive force within the dimension of space-time whose effect will be greater than the sum of its component forces."[73] *[Ok, guys on the kettlebells, over here, burpees jump to plate, over by the ring, ab-mat sit-up and box jumps that side. Remember you're working together, pace each other, yeah? There's a lot to get done but you have a fifteen-minute time cap.]* In the twentieth century, Deleuze argues, this enclosed system of social organization has given way to what he calls "societies of control."[74] The shift accompanies the historical transition from an industrial capitalism focused on production to one of services and immaterial labor.

Like the nineteenth-century neurasthenic body, the factory of the disciplinary society was a closed, thermodynamic system. Deleuze writes: "the factory was a body that contained its internal forces at a level of equilibrium, the highest possible in terms of production, the lowest possible in terms of wages."[75] In contrast, the defining "body" of the society of control is the corporation, which is "a spirit, a gas."[76] Like CrossFit, the corporation is a body that operates through constant variation—"challenges, contests, and highly comic group sessions"—as well as "perpetual training."[77] The predictable input-output models of the disciplinary society are replaced by a state of "perpetual metastability."[78] *[Keep moving, guys, keep moving!]* The panopticon (centralized but omnipresent) surveillance of the disciplinary society is replaced by networked self-control, mapping, positioning, and accounting—the body as a multiplicity of data points. CrossFit is the perfect exercise for the society of control, presupposing a constantly variable, perpetually unstable, and ever-expanding body potentiality.

Contamination

Deleuze's essay, written in 1992, seems an ever-more prescient vision of our techno-bureaucratic present. But what kinds of lived experience fall away from the grand theory? What forms of relation hide in plain sight in the society of control? I suggest that bodily practice enables relations of *contamination* that open us to the other—not necessarily in face-to-face encounters, but *sideways*, laterally, doing things together: *lateral sociality*. Becoming open to the other alongside us might then open the possibility for other forms of *poesis* (making) and *praxis* (action), new forms of what Dorinne Kondo calls "worldmaking."[79]

I pop into Boots [a British drugstore] *to buy some Clotrimazole cream. Training twice a day in July, even if it is a cooler, Glaswegian summer, has left me with a nasty case of jock itch and ringworm. I've been contaminated by others in the space. Where did this fungus come from? Who gave me this fungus? These questions are somewhat irrelevant. No one "gave" it to you. You just stayed in the sweat and funk and that's why you got it. This place lives on you, now. But still I want to get rid of it, and sheepishly purchase the tube of anti-fungal cream.*

Jock itch is a disgusting metaphor, but it does the job. The gym is such an obvious place of body-to-body cross-contamination, yet we choose to stay in the funk. Sure, you might have rules about not doing any contact training or rolling on the mats when you have ringworm, but seriously, what does that do? When the damp warmth of the inside of a Muay Thai glove hits bare skin, things bloom. *L. hands me his padded body shield, as we switch over punching and pad-work: "Sorry, it's a bit disgusting." "That's fine."* Fungal contamination is a mark of being affected by the other outside of traditional and normative forms of relation, intimacy, friendship, and sex. You can catch ringworm from someone without knowing their name, being friends, working together, or being intimate. Still, they affect you. That's why you itch.

What is the point of this? Surely, I am not saying that fungus offers new modes of "being together"? Perhaps not, but it is part of the symptomatology of bodies in the society of control, evidencing how we infect each other in uncontrolled ways. The anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing suggests another fungus-based example in her book *The Mushroom at the End of the World*. Her fieldwork follows the relations of production of the matsutake mushroom, a very expensive and highly prized mushroom that grows in human-disturbed and destroyed pine forests. For Tsing, matsutake are evidence of life in the interstices of capitalist destruction and ruin, bringing with them other lines of migration and cross-contamination. (Mien migrant workers come to Oregon to pick the mushrooms, for example.) She writes: "How does a gathering become a 'happening,' that is, greater than a sum of its parts? One answer is contamination. We are

contaminated by our encounters; they change who we are as we make way for others. As contamination changes world-making projects, mutual worlds—and new directions—may emerge."[80] Tsing's profoundly hopeful analysis contrasts with Deleuze's totalizing horror of an entirely technologized world, even if they emerge from the same society. Look here, she whispers, look at the mushrooms that come after the forest has been razed. Matsutake mushrooms signal the growth of new forms of life under precarity. As Tsing writes: "Precarity is the condition of being vulnerable to others. Unpredictable encounters transform us; we are not in control, even of ourselves. Unable to rely on a stable structure of community, we are thrown into shifting assemblages, which remake us as well as our others."[81] And precarity is a state we all share, even though it, like development, is both uneven and combined.

Let's pause for a moment. I don't entirely go along with this when the possibility of both technocratic control societies and climatological environmental catastrophe is a present reality. However, it begins to make sense of the lateral forms of sociality I experienced at EDA, and then noticed in other gyms.

People leave me alone when I'm doing Olympic lifting, but I do appreciate the presence of a kind of '"lateral" audience. This kind of lateral sociality *is important and was emphasized again by Tommy at the beginning of FYF: "You can go with a partner if you like to keep each other motivated." How do we define these relationships that you build "doing something" alongside someone, rather than chatting, consuming things, going for drinks? Especially as this is such a gendered thing—men "do things together," women "talk to each other."*

The idea that men have friends via activities, whereas women sit and talk about their feelings is a parochial bit of common-sense wisdom that seems sexist in all directions; but it derives from the sociologist Geoffrey Greif's study of nearly 400 men.[82] Greif's research shows that indeed male friendships often did not share the typical markers of intimacy (secrets, personal details), but his larger point was that these friendships should not be considered less important than female friendships. However, as my participation in the culture of the gym continued, I began to think about how lateral sociality—not just "doing-with" but sharing intense experiences and mutual *affection* (being affected by the other)—could explode the binaries of acceptable social relations. Is sharing intense physical sensations not a form of sharing feelings?

One day, stretching out on the astroturf after my Olympic lifting session, I see J. and D., two women in their forties, begin a partner workout under Valbo's coaching. The workout was a kind of relay—one partner would complete (for example) six lengths of the astroturf with the prowler while the other filled the time on the SkiErg, and then they would switch places.[83] *"C'mon bitch!" J. screams at D., as she takes too long to relieve*

her from the ski erg. D. suddenly seems to get a final burst of sprint energy to push out the remaining four lengths of the prowler within the final fifteen seconds, and then both of them fall onto the floor. I express a sympathetic laugh, and Valbo says, "Don't feel sorry for them, they're going drinking after this!" Forty or so minutes later I see them emerge from the changing rooms, hair dried and straightened, dressed smartly. "Going for lunch?" "Aye, we both have the day off," J. says. "Well, you earned it." "Just a bottle or two!" Their masculine-coded activity is immediately followed by something more legible as (female) friendship, but J. and D.'s dedication and commitment to the training (they are there every day) indicates that both dimensions of friendship hold equal importance. In the rest of my time, I am aware of how transformative training with EDA has been for them. I watch D. do her first unassisted pull-up, and the cry of exertion/joy is immediately recognizable. A personal best. Later, Valbo tells me, "That feeling of doing the pull-up probably means more to her than anything else."

The postcolonial theorist Leela Gandhi writes that friendship can be defined as "all those invisible affective gestures that refuse alignment along the secure axes of filiation to seek expression outside, if not against, possessive communities of belonging."[84] In distinction from a community in which "belonging" is premised on shared identity, Gandhi theorizes "affective" communities. I began to think of the gym as one such affective community, which comes into its own especially during FYF, a workout whose hard-core intensity and length are an interesting accompaniment to the weekend bacchanalian revels of the Glasgow city center. *The gym's website explains the class as: "This is our longest and often toughest session of the week. Only appearing on the timetable once a week on a Friday night, it is constantly varied each week, offering both physical and mental challenges; although an intense session, it can be scaled to any individual requirements." CrossFit, right? Except the class is 90 minutes long (that extra 30 minutes really makes a difference), and the first WOD has a 50-minute time cap. It begins with a ladder: 5 reps of box jump overs, KB swings, bike cals, wall balls, burpee pull-ups or knee-ups.*

Then 10 reps, then 15 reps, and so on, up to a full 25 reps on the final round. This was followed by 25 thrusters, and 250 turns of the heavy Muay Thai jump rope, with 5 press-ups whenever you stop.

I got to about 75 turns of the jump rope before time was called—one of the last, but I did keep up pace. Even though I'm now much more familiar with CrossFit, I found this one of the most difficult WODs I've done to date. I found myself constantly having to cheat (although I didn't skip out as many reps as I thought I would, and mainly I only did this on the burpee knee-ups, which must have taken nearly 10 minutes to do the final 25). Just as with CrossFit, Tommy began by explaining the amount of "work" to be done: "Gather round because we have a lot to get through . . ." Not a

lot to learn, or material to cover (something I often say in a class), simply a lot of tasks to do. Tommy and Paddy prowled around, joking, shooting me sympathetic looks, encouraging people, but really, no one needs encouragement, they're getting through it, buoyed by the atmosphere of lateral, affective work. Endorphins, surely, but also a distinct sense of letting the engine recharge and then just going for it, doing five reps of whatever because you suddenly found a little extra in the tank. On the last 25 cals on the bike, for instance, I hopped on one of the old bikes beside an older guy and we just go for it. There's probably 25 years' difference in age between us. Tommy comes over and says "You on your last ones? It's 50 cals on these bikes. They're easier than the black ones. Sorry, did I just ruin your night?' " Both of us groan in tandem, then continue grimly pedaling and I'm struck by the way a relation instantly forms through practice. I was in a real state during this class, though. My tank top was so wet I could wring it out over the sink.

Correction and Care

At their best, the relations in the gym lead to acts of care. Correction can be caring, rather than disciplinary. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that discipline does not *preclude* caring, so that care might emerge as an alternative value in corrective acts when we are doing embodied practice. I watch small acts of care emerge constantly across the course of my time at EDA. This is most prominent in the relations between coaches and members, but I find it unexpectedly in small gestures among members themselves, like the minute adjustment by the pad-holder of the partner's glove, or "cues" and corrections of form and technique: "Keep your hips down longer"; "Load up your hamstrings"; "Not here, *here*."

I'd been chatting with M., the only other member of the gym who I regularly see doing Olympic weightlifting. He's a student at Glasgow University. His technique is good, although he's not snatching or cleaning big weights yet. But he *works*. This is what all the coaches say too: "He works hard, you know, he's in here every day on the bar, and then comes in for Muay Thai in the evening." We decide to train together the next day. Tommy overhears us and wants to join in, and tells Valbo about it, and it becomes a *thing*. The next day, we meet at midday, get some bars out, and start working on technique. J., a weightlifting coach who works for a Scottish Institute of Sport, also happens to be there, renting the gym space for an hour or so to train a client.

"I got the fear, dude," Tommy says to me. What do you mean? *"I hurt my shoulder a while back, so I haven't snatched in ages." He walks up to my warm-up bar, with 40 kg on it. "Just let me try that one."* You should warm up first, *I tell him. He snatches it anyways, it doesn't look bad, but*

I see him wince as he puts the bar down. "Nope!" M. chastises him—"That's what you get when you go straight to 40 kg!" In the end, I run through some shoulder warm-ups, and Tommy goes back to snatching with the empty bar, building up again to 40 kg. He's fine, he just needed looking after, someone to rein in the impetus to go for broke.

Knowledge is passed across different levels, which marks out multiple relations in the space of the gym. I coach Mark on technique, but Mark in turn coaches and gives advice to Tommy and Valbo, who are less experienced (i.e., they know the technique but are out of practice). In turn, I ask J. to look at my triple extension, which has been bothering me. He doesn't tell me anything I don't know (keep the bar closer in the second pull), but just the act of asking for advice feels somewhat vulnerable. There's a coaches' habitus that I have picked up that J. also does (the head tilt)—where did this gesture come from, and why do all coaches do it? It strikes me how working on something in practice, improving on something, is a way of relating across differences, in this case the different ages and levels of experience in this group. We can begin to read gestures of "correction" and the sharing of technique as acts of care. M. takes care of Tommy by gently reprimanding him, "Yeah, let's put some more weight on the bar—except for Tommy, he's staying on 40." This gentle blow to the ego is a way of keeping Tommy safe, and it feels like caring, even if the verbal transcript can never fully reflect that.

Heat Death

It's FYF at the end of July and we do the familiar performance of exhaustion afterwards: lying on the floor, where you are, watching steam rise from your body. We stretch out and then I speak to C., who I have been training with. It is a strange position for a conversation, both of us on the ground, gasping for air and dripping onto the floor. "How did you find it? What did you get?" he asks. "I did two and a bit. But you were really going at it! Did you get four?" "No, three, but I couldn't get through the burpees." "The burpees were savage. I had to do 5 and rest." "Me too, and eventually 3 and rest." We discuss my research project, and C. tells me he works freelance, owns his own business surveying and doing renovations (I think). Before EDA he wasn't really training, then he found the place through a Facebook ad, and joined in January. "When I train I work better, I eat better. I like this place because I don't have to think about training until I get here at six, then it's go go go." I remark on the intensity, and how everyone pushes each other for an hour, because they know it will be over soon. "When you were really going for it at the end I got this second wind."

In a 1981 seminar on cinema at the Université Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis, Deleuze said that "movement" is matter "passing from one form

to another" (*passer d'une forme à une autre*).[85] He used the example of a horse in gallop to illustrate this point. A gallop is two forms, one, a form of muscular contraction, and two, a maximum of muscular extension [*développement*]. Therefore, if the contraction/extension movement of press-ups and burpees is a continuous passing [*ne cesse de passe*] from form A to form B, might we not regard other bodily forms in the same way, not only from contraction to extension but from failure to success? What unites the form of my body at its maximum point of muscular contraction and my overloaded body lying prone on the rubberized floor? What if we were to forego the individual subjectivity that binds such movement to narrative and identity, in favor of flows of affects and intensities of matter passing from one phase to another?

Deleuze's formulation of bodies and movement suggests another understanding of the performance of overload in the CrossFit box. Instead of a survival aesthetics of white woundedness, the performance of overload, in its lateral social organization, might suggest a value in shared affective experience, a new way of relating to one's body as well as other bodies. If C.'s capacity to work can affect my own, I can also see my own body not as a bounded organism, but as something that can affect and be affected by others. This is the "lateral" sociality that I conceived of earlier, a form of relation not dependent on the face-to-face encounter, with its insistence on the individual, bounded subject. Lateral sociality, instead, is a less predictable form of relation predicated on a sideways openness to embodied others.

Valbo positioned the experience of the gym in contrast to the experience of the individual user of a "commercial gym": "the coaching, the group training, is really what this place is all about, and I think that's why people come and pay a bit more money, because of the community." In this way, like many CrossFit boxes, EDA draws on what Miranda Joseph calls the "romantic discourse of community," which positions community as a romantic ideal that has been superseded by capitalism and modernity (represented in this case by the individualistic exerciser in the commercial gym).[86] But as Joseph points out, community isn't resistant or antagonistic to capitalism, but *supplementary* to it. (Indeed, we can see this in the way that the CrossFit brand leverages community as a way of justifying not only its existence, but also its very high membership fees and level of commitment.)[87] In this way, EDA's strong community cannot be separated from the larger capitalistic project of urban transformation taking place in Glasgow. But the idea of "lateral sociality" I have developed in this section, on the other hand, while not antagonistic to postmodern capitalism, represents the forms of relationality that might leak from it, like sweat. In the space of intense bodily experience there is the possibility of contamination across bodies, the potential dissolution of the bounded, closed system. Bodies that work together and disperse, having affected and been affected by each other.

The discovery of the second law of thermodynamics in the middle of the nineteenth century suggested that life, like any closed system, would end in entropy, the heat death of the universe. This context values, according to Luciana Parisi and Tiziana Terranova, "the disciplined body," which "is the thermodynamic organism, the hierarchical organization of organs, bounded within a self, crossed by currents of energy tending towards entropy and death."[88] The disciplined body is the body that suffers from neurasthenia, the entropy of nervous energy; it moves from institution to institution: family, school, factory. It is on this model of the body that the drama of failure and recovery played out as a primal scene of the white, male, individualist subject of bourgeois capitalism, through technologies of self-improvement and exercise. This white male bourgeois subject—Wynter's descriptive statement of Man, which stalks these pages—is tied to the historical scene of industrial capitalism, represented by both Theodore Dreiser's railways and the ruins of Port Dundas. But today, when industrial capitalism has mutated into a system of circulation of "decoded flows," how might we interpret these same technologies of self-improvement and recovery?[89] When affects, relations, and flows are at stake, I suggest that the turbulence of bodies affecting and being affected might provide a counter to both the individualism of the white male bourgeois subject and the society of control, even in a bodily practice like CrossFit, which, on the surface and in its historical reading, seems like the apotheosis of control. In the ruins of the precarious present, like matsutake, like jock itch, grow new relations and ways of being together, through the performance of failure and recovery.

Chapter 5

✦

Grappling

George Hackenschmidt's Education in Wrestling

Ontological Weariness

In his unpublished autobiography, George Hackenschmidt, wrestler, strongman, bodybuilder, physical culturist, performer, and philosopher, writes:

> Night after night, as I entered my dressing-room, I was weary of meeting this almost endless succession of giant opponents: there seemed to be no time at all even for reasonable rest as I donned my costume, still damp from the previous evening's exertions. Before the end of it all, the task had become so utterly wearisome that I was dying to get away from the hullabuloo to some place where there would be peace, where I could enjoy being alone for a change. Yet I will admit that each new victory added to my self-confidence, and, in spite of all the hard work, I knew I was closer than ever to perfect physical condition.[1]

In this passage, Hackenschmidt is competing in an international wrestling tournament in Vienna, in 1900. It is a "real" sporting competition, yet the way he describes the series of opponents seems closer to theater. The inevitability of victory brings with it boredom and weariness. His body is revolting at repetition. The emptiness of "going through the motions" is felt even more deeply in the theater because the motions are pretend. When I was 24, I played Thuy in *Miss Saigon* for over 80 performances. Nothing was more depressing than going onstage for the evening show in a costume soaked with cold sweat from the matinée. Some days you cannot fathom performing again, you *cannot* perform again, yet you perform, again. This weariness is connected to the most compromised aspects of the modern theater: its reproducibility and standardization, and the circulation of these values within the leisure economies of late capitalism.

Sport does not become theater only when, like in professional wrestling, its outcome is known in advance. Taking place in a grand theater for the entertainment of the Viennese bourgeoisie, the wrestling tournament was as much theater as any musical. Thus, Hackenschmidt's weariness is a mode of feeling adjacent to the "ontological queasiness" Jonas Barish diagnoses as part of theater's distorting effect on reality.[2]

At the same time, Hackenschmidt's "endless succession" of giant opponents, his workmanlike approach to the "task," reminds us of twentieth-century *performance*, the mode of live event so often set in opposition to the *theater.* If theatrical repetitions are wearisome because the gestures are not real, performative repetitions are wearisome because they *are*. In contrast to the entertainment and spectacle of the Viennese wrestling tournament, Hackenschmidt's writing prompts us to imagine his succession of matches as a durational performance akin to the time-based artworks of Tehching Hsieh, Yoko Ono, and Marina Abramović, one in which victory is assured but the work never stops.[3]

Hackenschmidt's physical culturist background is shown in the quotation's final line: "in spite of all the hard work, I knew I was closer than ever to perfect physical condition." But, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, Hackenschmidt's concept of "perfect physical condition" was by no means straightforward. Furthermore, it was influenced, if not determined, by his life in the theater, as well as his rejection of a set of ideas around the body and its action that I will broadly define as *theatricality*. If, as I have argued in chapter 1, the practice of bodybuilding is often critiqued through an "anti-theatrical" discourse, Hackenschmidt's body of work and knowledge attempted to spin anti-theatricality into *praxis*.

I am compelled to return to the "scene" of Hackenschmidt, to grapple with him again and again. Hackenschmidt was the figure who bridged the gap between my research in professional wrestling and physical culture,[4] but he might have bridled at being called a "pro wrestler." While he has been interpellated into the historiography of pro wrestling as the first "World Heavyweight Wrestling Champion," the endless speculation over the "reality" of his matches (or any wrestling during that time) is inconclusive.[5] Perhaps historians (and I am guilty here too) are all "keeping kayfabe"—Hackenschmidt certainly is. In wrestling, "kayfabe" is the presentation of staged events and performances as if they were spontaneous and genuine, not only inside the theater, but outside of it too (in interactions with non-insiders and media). As I show in this chapter, Hackenschmidt rejected the suggestion that *his* matches were ever worked (staged), as well as theatricality—which he associated with deception, fakery, and inauthenticity—itself. But while he disavowed the theater, the place in which his career was made, the theater provided the ground for the creation of his concepts. Like Plato, who was also a wrestler, rejecting theatrical deception was key to the formulation of his philosophy.[6]

Whereas Plato's wrestling was part of his youthful education in the *gymnasium*, Hackenschmidt's philosophy is often considered part of his "late style."[7] Hackenschmidt toured Europe as a wrestler before settling in England, where he was engaged by the theatrical impresario Sir Charles Blake Cochran. He continued wrestling and performing internationally for many years, before serving as a physical education instructor to the House of Lords and writing several books, including works of philosophy. He was taken seriously in his time. He corresponded and met with George Bernard Shaw (who himself wrote articles for Bernarr MacFadden's *Physical Culture*), and he gave lectures at Cambridge and Columbia University. For Jan Todd, Hackenschmidt is a "forgotten sport philosopher," whose work grapples with similar questions in the philosophy of sports such as ethics and the nature of truth.[8] But I want to argue that Hackenschmidt was not only a philosopher of sport, but a philosopher of performance. His philosophy resonates with contemporary non-representational practices in the theater, as well as anticipating, by several decades, the "anti-theatrical" or non-acting turn from theater to performance in the late twentieth century. This includes the body-based and durational performance art mentioned earlier, as well as experiments we might still class as "theater," such as the "poor theater" of Polish director Jerzy Grotowski, the Performance Group's *Dionysus in '69*, and the Living Theater's *Paradise Now*. I propose that Hackenschmidt's philosophical "turn" was not really a turn at all, but rather a continuation of the questions he posed in *practice* from the beginning of his career. By situating Hackenschmidt—a minor, popular entertainment figure who is rarely more than a footnote in theater history—as a practitioner-thinker alongside other experimental theater-makers in the twentieth century, I argue that the practice of physical culture, especially on an everyday level, is a site of embodied "thought" that grapples with questions of freedom, agency, consciousness, ideology, and power.

The Problem of Influence

In this chapter, I focus on Hackenschmidt's body of writing in order to understand the heart of his physical and philosophical practice. In doing so, I am setting Hackenschmidt in a context, both historical and generic, even though as someone who wrestled, wrote, performed, lectured, and lifted, and who was born in the late Victorian era but lived until 1968, Hackenschmidt slipped out of contexts as easily as his opponents' holds. Therefore, I look for shared ideas, phrases, and lines of thought across Hackenschmidt's writing and the philosophical and artistic modes of the twentieth century. In other words, one could say I am searching for *influence*. But "influence" raises a methodological problem. Similarities and

shared ideas are not evidence of influence. There is no evidence to verify that Hackenschmidt influenced any of the thinkers or practitioners I will discuss, though his ideas circulated widely. Furthermore, Hackenschmidt himself shut down speculation that he was influenced by others. "Reading books?" he writes, "They could not supply the answer. It was my bodily system alone which could furnish all the information I needed."[9] Hackenschmidt's eschewal of reading marks him as an iconoclast, but also makes it impossible to verify any influences upon him. What's more, this chapter mainly discusses bodily practices and techniques, where influence is typically conceived of as direct transmission, in which the student inherits the knowledge of the master. We might plot direct bodily transmission through the people Hackenschmidt trained with (Georg Lurich) or his encounters in the ring (Frank Gotch). But to claim any influence in either direction between him and the field of theater and performance is impossible—there is no evidence for this.

Robert Douglas-Fairhurst claims that thinking about influence is a question of "how we understand understanding itself."[10] When we use the word "influence," we use a "shared cultural shorthand for the desire to make connections as well as to describe them."[11] In other words, the search for influence among otherwise discrete texts, persons, and bodies "allows the circulation and flow of ideas to be charted as they create and resist alliances with one another," to think about how the world is divided, categorized and connected.[12] As such, I find Douglas-Fairhurst's Victorian metaphor of *atmosphere* (voices, particles, ideas *in the air*) highly *influential*—the air as open space enables the mixing of what otherwise might be kept separate, allowing for contamination and contagion as well as fertilization. If atmosphere was a way for Victorian writers to think through the porous borders of bodies, it is also a fruitful methodological tool to think about how historical figures might move across porous disciplinary boundaries: in this case, sports and physical culture history, popular entertainment, experimental theater, and Continental philosophy. In other words, shared concepts in bodily practices like wrestling, physical culture, and actor training are not then always the product of direct *transmission*, but are perhaps the result of an embodied response to social, economic, and political forces "in the air." But if the air was where ideas mixed, how do they take shape as a form of "understanding"? Walter Benjamin's notion of the constellation is perhaps helpful here. He noted that ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars; ideas enable us to perceive relations between object, people, and things in the world.[13] In other words, a constellation describes individual entities whose shape takes form once a mental or conceptual shift takes place. By avoiding the trap of positivist, linear transmission, the concept enables us to plot out the diverse connections across Edwardian wrestling, existential philosophy, and twentieth-century theater and performance.

World Wrestling Efficacy

The first half of George Hackenschmidt's life story—his career as a wrestler—is familiar to most enthusiasts of physical culture. In the biographical second half of *The Way to Live in Health and Physical Fitness*, he writes: "I was born on July 20, 1878 (Old Style), or August 2, according to English methods of reckoning, at Dorpat, in Russia, my father being the proprietor of some dye-works there."[14] From an early age, he was "devoted to all bodily exercises" and showed an aptitude for gymnastics, weightlifting, and cycling.[15] Unlike many, if not most, physical culturists, Hackenschmidt was not a weak or sickly child—in fact, "by the time I was eight or nine years old I used to order about a small army of boys of my own age—being admittedly the strongest of them all."[16] In 1895, Hackenschmidt began an engineering apprenticeship in Reval (now Tallinn, Estonia) and joined the Reval Athletic and Cycling Club, where he began training with heavy weights. By age twenty Hack found himself at a crossroads, a point he develops in further detail in his unpublished autobiography, "The Russian Lion." Feeling confident in his strength and abilities as a wrestler, Hackenschmidt goes with his friend Kalde to visit a Dr. von Krajewski in St. Petersburg. "If I couldn't find work in an engineering office, I might get taken on as a professional athlete in a circus," he speculates, "but before I took any definite step, I wanted to hear what Dr Krajewsky had to say about it."[17] Krajewski is described as a "bachelor" who "had an excellent practice in the highest circles of society and passed for a millionaire," and "the organizer of a private club of men of fashion who came to him weekly and worked hard with weights and dumb-bells and practiced wrestling."[18] After examining Hack's stripped body, Krajewski is impressed by the young man's physique. "'I can offer you a room and meals but no money,'" he tells Hackenschmidt. "'If you care to accept this, in three months time you'll be the strongest man in the world.'"[19] Hackenschmidt trains with Krajewski and the many other wrestlers in his circle, and soon he begins to tour Europe as a wrestler, before settling in England. He parlayed his celebrity into a successful stage act, which also featured "posing," and a lecture on physical culture itself.[20] Hackenschmidt's two bouts with the American wrestler Frank Gotch have been interpellated by professional wrestling history as an early example that established the multiple narratives and "babyface/heel" dynamics in their contemporary form, as well as wrestling's connection to nationalist and xenophobic politics.[21]

Theatricality frames Hackenschmidt's narrative like a proscenium arch, even if he was later repulsed by it. For instance, the scene of his conversion to physical culture, his version of Atlas's bully and Sandow's statues, is a theatrical one. Fable-like, he describes a day at age thirteen when the circus comes to town. At his strict school, "no boys, except those in the

top class, were allowed to attend such shows."[22] Getting into the show therefore required some theatrical deception: "I blackened my face and borrowed a suit of clothes from a boy friend."[23] Sneaking past his teacher, Hackenschmidt positions himself in the crowd in the standing room section and watches the show. He writes: "When the wrestlers came on, my heart 'went plop with a wiggle between' and I could hardly breathe for fear I should miss any of the action. . . . In fact, I got so worked up over it that I determined I'd never rest until I had become every bit as strong as they appeared to be."[24] As I argue in my article "A Professional Body," Hackenschmidt's arrival in England in 1902 was similarly theatrical—a repetition of a key moment in wrestling dramaturgy, the acceptance, by a newcomer, of the champion's challenge.[25] The incumbent was the Cornish-American wrestler Jack Carkeek, and the event took place at the Alhambra Theatre in Leicester Square. There are multiple accounts of the event, several of which are reproduced in Hackenschmidt's autobiography, and the incident is a highly performative trope that occurs throughout the manuscript. For example, the *Daily Express* reports that when Carkeek gave his usual challenge to the audience,

> at that moment an unexpected thing happened. Four business-like gentlemen, in defiance of custom, stepped on to the stage from the stage-box, and after them came a wrestler with so splendid a figure that a murmur of admiration went through the house. A tall, fair-haired giant, stripped to the waist, the muscles standing out in great rolls on his chest and arms, and so admirably proportioned that his immensity could only be realised when he stood beside a commissionaire. He made an instant sensation.[26]

While the *Express*'s reporter notes that this was an "unrehearsed scene," the event resembles any standard wrestling entrance seen week after week on any World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) television program, complete with managers/entourage and pre-ring costume. Furthermore, while avoiding any suggestion of a pre-arrangement between Carkeek and Hackenschmidt, London's *Health and Strength* magazine confirms at least some theatrical "intention" by presenting the event from Hackenschmidt's point of view: "Hackenschmidt, who had stripped and got into his wrestling togs in the shadow of the box, was now ready and quivering with excitement as the well-delivered words of Jack's challenge went forth."[27]

What does it mean to call this event "theatrical"? It is not to suggest that the challenge itself was "not real," but rather that the act aimed at something other than simply fulfilling the obligations of the performative (to agree to wrestle the other). Hackenschmidt's act was *intended* to create a sensation, to impress its audience. As Jody Enders writes, "any interpretation of the conception, performance, or reception of theater

must recognize that individuals or collectives who make theater *intend to make theater.*"[28] This is to say, any spontaneous, accidental, or "unrehearsed" scene or action in the event must be interpreted in relation to this original intention. To further develop this book's taxonomy of "theatrical masculinities," then, we must also include such intentional acts—whether they are "deceptive" or "fake" or not. The event (and what was reported of it) denaturalizes the form of masculinity of which it is putatively an expression.

Soon after his arrival in London, Hackenschmidt was introduced to Sir Charles Blake Cochran, a famous theater impresario. Cochran produced and promoted across the spectrum of theatrical performance, including serious drama, popular entertainments, music hall, and indeed, wrestling shows. Cochran secured a series of contracts for Hackenschmidt at the fair sum of £350 and became his manager. Cochran was skilled at working the audience, trading in the layers of reality surrounding the event of the wrestling match, a hallmark of professional wrestling's kayfabe today. One incident in Liverpool exemplifies Cochran's dramaturgy, and his shrewd understanding of how the public receives an event.[29] Cochran hired the empty Prince of Wales Theatre, in Clayton Square, in order to stage a series of matches. The manager of the Prince of Wales, Mr. Cleaver, fearing he might be endangering the theater's license by allowing wrestling to take place, barred Cochran from proceeding with the event. Cochran proceeded anyways, with the ban only drumming up more publicity. On the first night, Cleaver stopped the wrestling by cutting the pipes to the gaslights, only for Cochran to send for an intrepid pipefitter to restore the lights, and the bout went ahead.[30] On the second night, Cleaver had the police enforce a rule and throw out Cochran and his wrestlers by midnight, and on the third night, he barricaded the doors entirely. Cochran and his wrestlers stormed the theater, engaging in violent skirmishes with Cleaver's people (the "Battle of Clayton Square") before discovering that the theater's seats had been removed overnight.[31] The publicity created by this event was key to igniting a new boom in wrestling.[32] By staging a public event that traded in the wrestling body's capacity to do actual violence (breaking into the barricaded theater with bare hands!), Cochran manipulated the audience's scopophilic desire to his own advantage. Again, we can call this event *theatrical* not because it was not "real," but rather, because it was *intended*; as much as the ensuing "battle" may have been accidental, Cochran's defiance of Cleaver's ban on wrestling was intended to antagonize the manager.

Cochran also applied his skilled dramaturgy to the performance events themselves, recognizing that Hackenschmidt's great strength was not enough to secure him new gigs, since he "possessed none of the arts and tricks of showmanship."[33] He encouraged Hackenschmidt to extend his matches, playing with his opponents to give the semblance of a dramatic

fight.[34] He hired Tom Cannon, Hackenschmidt's former opponent, as a showmanship coach. He even hired a "heel," the German wrestler Schackmann, to develop Hackenschmidt's heroic persona. As Kent writes, "Schackmann would foul Hackenschmidt repeatedly, abuse the crowd, even throw the referee into the orchestra pit, before going down to inglorious defeat at the hands of the Russian." When Hackenschmidt challenged local wrestlers, he would allow them to last ten minutes, earning a prize, before soundly defeating them in another bout later in the week. In other words, Cochran developed a narrative. While Hackenschmidt, Kent notes, "did not like these practices," "he allowed Cochran to persuade him that music-hall wrestling was principally entertainment, and that concessions to showmanship were never immoral."[35]

In "Hamlet Doesn't Blade: Professional Wrestling, Theatre, and Performance," I argue, along with Eero Laine and Claire Warden, that professional wrestling as a live event represents "a special case, in that it is at once scripted, theatrical, and fake, and improvised, performed, and real."[36] One illustration of this principle is the act of "blading," a convention of the squared circle in which a wrestler will secretly make a small cut to their hairline in order to simulate another form of injury—usually the famous steel chair to the head. The blood is real, though the wound is self-inflicted and representative of *another* form of injury; it is an intentional theatrical gesture whose effects are certainly "real." In this way, blading, as a crystallization of professional wrestling's liminal theatricality, troubles Richard Schechner's well-known "entertainment-efficacy" braid of performance studies, a continuum between performances (rituals, marriage ceremonies, and often, performance art and body art) with effects in the real world (they are *performative*), and those representational performances, such as theater, that do not. We see the complex entanglement of entertainment with efficacy in the case of Hackenschmidt and Cochran's partnership: it is entertainment that enables Hack to concede to practices that might otherwise seem like cheating or disturb the principles of sportsmanship, but it also shows how fixing a match is not the only way theatricality intrudes upon wrestling and sport more generally. Theatricality, in terms of intended effect, produced affects (feelings), and drama (such as supporting the underdog team) is everywhere in the sport-spectacle, regardless of whether it is fixed.

Those who witnessed Hackenschmidt's performances set him in contrast to circus strongmen and other music hall performers like Sandow. He was often likened to an animal. For instance, an article from *Sandow's Magazine* in 1902 (which Hackenschmidt includes almost in total in "The Russian Lion") says: "truly tiger-like as he is, slightly crouching, he glides backward and forward, alert, sinuous and withal reposeful until the moment comes to move. And when the movement is made it is as swift, unerring and seemingly as inevitable as fate."[37] Hackenschmidt represents

not "perfection," but "potentialities"—he is aligned with *doing* and *acting* rather than being looked at or posing. The connection of Hackenschmidt to efficacious performativity rather than useless theatricality was reflected in his physique. Even when "Hackenschmidt stands relaxed and easy, you realize that this man is a veritable storehouse of controlled dynamic energy, of moving force, well-balanced and susceptible to the slightest impulse of the brain."[38] In an article, Cochran reflects on his first impressions of Hack's physique: "I went back to the Hotel Cecil [where Hackenschmidt was staying] with him, where he stripped, and I was amazed at his magnificent physique. No bulging biceps such as the conventional 'strong man' exhibits, but the smooth easy-rippling muscles of the perfectly trained athlete. . . . From a physical point of view he was the most superb specimen of humanity I have ever seen."[39] Contrasting Hackenschmidt's physique with "bulging"—excessive—theatricality, Cochran aligns Hack's body with the natural and authentic. He is built, but he is not a bodybuilder. His physique has *function*. It is efficacious. Thus, his body, at the turn of the twentieth century, points to a binary between the functional and the showy in men's fitness, which continues to be played out today in the disciplinary distinctions between functional fitness such as CrossFit, weightlifting, and gymnastics on the one hand, and bodybuilding on the other.

"Obedient to the Letter": Hackenschmidt's Anti-Theatricality

Hackenschmidt's autobiography and many of his published and unpublished essays show a distinct rejection of theatricality. The first instance comes early: during Hack's stay at Dr. von Krajewski's house in St. Petersburg, the English strongman Samson arrives in town. Hackenschmidt watches him performing the various feats with apparatuses and props described in chapter 3: tearing packs of cards, breaking coins. To Hackenschmidt, these performances "ought not to have been classed with athletics, seeing that they are largely due to sleight of hand."[40] Hackenschmidt is irritated by Samson's very way of being: "his swagger, showmanship and theatrical manner which was so noticeable in everything he did or said."[41]

Theatricality was associated with capitalism and anxieties over the ability to cheat others in this economic system, as demonstrated by the professional/amateur distinction in wrestling. When Hackenschmidt is on the verge of turning professional, his uncle advises him against it: "'You'll become a mountebank," he warns him. "Better be an ordinary workman than a charlatan."[42] Hackenschmidt did not heed his uncle's advice, and long before his meeting with Cochran, he traveled to Alsleben, Germany, to learn the tricks of a showman from Theodor Siebert.[43] Being a "professional" in this sense is not only about being good enough to sustain a living; it also means impressing a crowd. The amateur does not need to

solicit the crowd's attention. Hatred of theater is thus veiled discomfort at the relations of production laid bare. By 1897 (when he gained the title of World's Wrestling Champion), Hackenschmidt was expressing discomfort over the gradual "working" of professional wrestling.[44] Other competitors, he notes, had begun to make "previous arrangements" about their matches, and would be upset by his refusal to do so too. "Show wrestling" began to replace actual competition, led by wrestlers who (according to Hackenschmidt) had failed to get anywhere in competitive wrestling: "They'd engage a troop of impressive looking men and tour the country with them, town by town, invariably advertising their show as world-championship contests. And presently this led to all sorts of business men becoming interested in the game as a money-making concern."[45] In a U.S. interview in 1938, Hackenschmidt lays the blame on audiences, for being impressed and desiring such cheap entertainment and thrills over true contests: "The public has forced such a condition on the wrestlers of the present day, and the promoters must follow its whims. The public want buffoonery and the slapstick, a show, and it is the boss in this instance."[46]

Beyond ethics and sportsmanship, the question of "working" a match reflects a larger preoccupation with theatricality as a *bodily* concern. In Hackenschmidt's philosophical system, it is action that matters, and "showing" is not "doing." "It was always spontaneity of action," he writes, "on the part of my adversaries, not mere skill, that appealed to me."[47] "Spontaneity" here might be substituted for "authenticity"; as I will go on to demonstrate, it is only by acting without recourse to memory, drill, strictures, or pre-planning that a human being may be authentic. In this way, Hackenschmidt finds any form of training system suspect. Describing one "exceptionally well developed" challenger who follows the Sandow system, he writes: "His muscles stood out in big bunches and he looked the real thing to an inexperienced eye. But not only did his artificiality, scientifically procured development interfere with his action, his lungs were also in bad relationship with the actions of his limbs. Never in my life have I seen such a *pitiful monstrosity.*"[48] Evoking the Promethean fear of science interfering with nature through the trope of the monstrous, as in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Hackenschmidt complicates his place in the historiography of physical culture. How can a figure who contributed so significantly to physical culture by embodying ideal masculine physicality reject the very thing (training) on which physical culture is centered? To answer this question, I now turn to two of Hackenschmidt's unpublished philosophical manuscripts in which he thinks through authenticity in contrast to obedient, dictated, or trained actions.

In two of these essays, he deals with the question of the theater, and specifically, *acting*, in detail. First, in an essay titled "Sentiment," he writes: "Sentiment is in no sense of the word true and natural. Otherwise it would be impossible for these same people, who on the one hand evince

sentiment for displays in cinemas, theatres, churches and in social functions and actually shed tears, and on the other hand to shut their ears, eyes and pockets to true suffering."[49] On the one hand, his critique of "sentiment" appears to be a rationalist critique of the nineteenth-century mode of sentimentality—in short, the humanist mode of holding a capacity for feeling in greater regard than reason. On the other hand, Hackenschmidt *opposes* sentiment to feeling ("Sentiment does not represent Truth. Feeling is Truth").[50] The issue, then, is not feeling itself, but false or "schooled" feeling, which is promoted by "cinemas, theatres, art, in short all *acting*."[51] Hackenschmidt is rehearsing a similar argument to *Hamlet*. In act 2, scene 2 of Shakespeare's play, the Player King recites a speech recounting Hecuba's response to news of her husband Priam's murder. The Player blanches and begins to cry real tears, and Hamlet is appalled:

> Is it not monstrous that this player here,
> But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
> Could force his soul so to his own conceit
> That from her working all his visage wann'd,
> Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,
> A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
> With forms to his conceit? and all for nothing![52]

To put it in Hackenschmidt's terms, *sentiment* forces the appearance of a real, bodily action (tears). Here, the audience for sentimental art is akin to acting, for they too are moved by the false actions in front of them (or which they dream), but they behave in everyday life as Hamlet, in his "despairing numbness."[53] Hackenschmidt, unlike Hamlet, has no use for acting as a thing to catch the king's conscience, but he still believes sentimentality is a trap, snaring the human being in dictated traditions, values, and actions. In a later essay, "Obedient to the Letter or Command: Attitudes towards One's Neighbour in the World of Untruth," he writes: "The public of these actors is itself no longer very far removed from the wretched untruth of the actor's achievements. . . . The present-day admirers of theatrical performances who, civilised on schools and gyms[,] have nothing else to represent but memory-directed play-acting before one another."[54] As for actors themselves, Hackenschmidt writes, they are on the same level as the "obedient servant [who] denies his ego and his self," and "the servile cringing manner in which he reflects the smile or anger of his master" is depressing to see.[55] Like the servant who denies his own freedom, actors do not "represent their own, individual qualities and attributes, nor their own personal apparent-truth skills and accomplishments."[56] He goes on to note the low esteem in which actors are held in China ("on the same level as prostitutes"), and argues that owing to their "great degeneration and the weakness of their life energies [*sic*] re-action

to the impressions of the environment, they are particularly well suited for pretence and deception."[57]

Considering these essays, we might reasonably suggest that Hackenschmidt didn't like theater. I propose, however, that theater here is providing a useful philosophical exemplar to work through ideas of authentic feeling, action, and reaction. Consider his description of the servant who "denies his ego and his self." The servant's "cringing servile manner" brings to mind Jean-Paul Sartre's sketch of the café waiter in *Being and Nothingness*:

> His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes toward the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly; his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the customer. Finally there he returns, trying to imitate in his walk the inflexible stiffness of some kind of automaton while carrying his tray with a recklessness of a tight-rope walker by putting it in a perpetually unstable, perpetually broken equilibrium which he perpetually re-establishes by a light movement of the arm and hand.[58]

A fundamental tenet of existentialist philosophy is that each human subject is free to give meaning to their lives through actions and projects (what Sartre calls *transcendence*). Sartre's example illustrates the concept of "bad faith," a state of being in which human beings deny this innate freedom. Bad faith is distinguished from lying, where "the liar intends to deceive and he does not seek to hide this intention from himself."[59] Rather, in bad faith, "it is from myself that I am hiding the truth."[60] In a situation of bad faith, one hides the *intentional* quality of the deception, that is, the choice to deceive oneself, for such acknowledgment would turn bad faith into good. In doing so, the subject negates his fundamental freedom and attributes his being solely to external limitations. The waiter acts as if he is a kind of automaton, a mere "thing," but by acting too "waiter-like," playing the part badly, he reveals the innate freedom that he is denying ("as if it were not just in my power to confer their value and their urgency upon my duties and the rights of my position, as if it were not my free choice to get up each morning at five o'clock or to remain in bed, even though it meant getting fired. As if from the very fact that I sustain this role in existence I did not transcend it on every side").[61] In Sartre, too, this self-imposed unfreedom is comparable to acting. The subject who plays at being a café waiter knows the waiter is a role: "I can be he [the subject as waiter] only in the neutralized mode as the actor is Hamlet, by mechanically making the *typical gestures* of my state and by aiming at myself as an imaginary café waiter through those gestures taken as an 'analogue.' "[62] Bad faith and acting both require self-deception.

Being and Nothingness was published in French in 1943 (as *L'Être et le néant*). While neither "Sentiment" nor "Obedient to the Letter" are dated, the forensic historical work of Jan Todd and the Stark Center archivists tells us that they would have dated from over a decade before. Furthermore, most of Hackenschmidt's publications came out in 1939. And while Hackenschmidt spoke some French, and was married to a Frenchwoman, the complexity of Sartre's prose would have proven difficult for him. In short, I do not believe Hackenschmidt read *L'Être et le néant*. Rather, in marking the similarities between bad faith and Hackenschmidt's critique of "obedience" as a similar denial of the ego and self, we return to the problem of *influence*. Like the existentialist philosophers, Hackenschmidt's philosophy is primarily concerned with living authentically. But this shared value does not mean that Hackenschmidt should be included in the reading lists as an "outsider philosopher." Rather, these shared values, concepts, and intensities make it possible to think through ideas that were "in the air" at the time, to suggest that ideas may arise through encounters both scholarly and carnal. And in Hackenschmidt's case, it was (literally) grappling with the problem of the theater that prompted or moved his conceptual thinking.

"It Is from Within": Hackenschmidt and Philosophy

In 1913 Hackenschmidt met his future wife, Rachel Marie Lucienne Blondeau, in Paris, and they traveled back to Estonia to see his hometown. Upon the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the two were detained as "civilian prisoners" in Berlin, on their way back to France.[63] It was here that his philosophical interests began in earnest. George and Rachel, released in 1918, moved to London, and George decided to open a school of physical culture. However, as he describes in *It Is from Within* (1934), "During my own training I had realised that some force within me was constantly destroying all the benefits I had obtained from that training. I could only maintain my condition by persistent efforts."[64] It was training itself that was the problem, since its improvements were only ever temporary. "I realized then," he writes, "that unless I could discover what brought about forgetfulness and why the bodily system deteriorated immediately [once] training was suspended, whatever I could offer the public would have no true value."[65]

In 1932 he published *Entthronung des Hirns: Grundlagen für die Wiederherstellung der Einigkeit und des Friedens im Menschen und in der Menschheit* (*Dethronement of Brain: Foundations for the Restoration of Unity and Peace in Man and Mankind*). *Entthronung* is a long and complex book, at 278 pages much longer than any of the pamphlets in English that followed. Here Hackenschmidt outlines the foundations for a philosophical system. The universe, or "cosmos," for him is made of energy and

rhythm, and the human being is an expression of that energy. Like René Descartes and his study of the pineal gland, Hackenschmidt attempted to locate human subjectivity in a bodily process, here, the sympathetic nervous system.[66] Associated with the "flight or fight" response, the sympathetic nervous system regulates unconscious reflexes in the body. Because the human body *must* respond in relation to its environment, it follows that "the human bodily system is inseparably linked with the Energy and Rhythm of the Cosmos and that human behaviour in its perfect state is dominated by Cosmic Rhythm and Energy."[67]

As such, the human being can exist in one of four distinct states in relation to the cosmos:

(a) Absolute Truth (*wahrhaftige*): "in which the human being as an organism is the perfect medium of expression for his Life-Energy."
(b) Relative Truth (*wahrheitliche*): where "the human being gives *relatively* true expression to his life energy."
(c) Apparent Truth (*wahrscheinbare*): "in which the human being as an organism is only capable [of] giving apparently-true expression to his life energy."
(d) Untruth (*unwahrheitliche*): "in which the human being is untrue to his own life Energy and functions as the unfeeling, unreasoning instrument of some form of dictation."[68]

In the state of perfection, the human being would act in harmony with its environment by responding (to use a key term of existentialism) *authentically.* But what then produces the less-than-perfect states? In Hackenschmidt's work, there are three primary causes of distortions. First is the consumption of "imperfect" food and "excitants, intoxicants, or narcotics."[69] These vices were the cause of "all disorderly conduct, conduct that is vicious, wicked and cruel," because not only does the sympathetic nervous system vibrate with "cosmic rhythmic energy," but so do the cells themselves.[70] Although Hackenschmidt's cell-theory would be debunked from a scientific perspective today, it demonstrates how otherwise abstract concepts are rooted in bodily processes. The second cause is memory itself, which for Hackenschmidt is a negative thing. His 1937 book *The Three Memories and Forgetfulness* (1937) could be read as a response to Henri Bergson's *Matter and Memory* (1896), though there is no evidence that Hackenschmidt was aware of Bergson. Bergson resists the reduction of spirit to body and posits memory, in the form of "image remembrance," as fundamentally free. Consciousness arises from the uniting of body in the present with spirit anchored in the past, while the unreflective individual is at risk of becoming an "automaton."[71] In the other corner, Hackenschmidt argues that memory is a false representation of the true present. The individual reliant on memory "no longer meets the incentives from without by

direct contact, but only indirectly, through the interference of the memory of the limb-system and the brain."[72] Instead, the ideal (as summarized by Terry Todd and Spencer Maxcy) is to "live each moment with all of one's total life force, free from historic consciousness, free from the dead weight of memory and remembrance."[73]

The third, and most paradoxical factor (for a physical culturist), is *training* itself, or "drill." In fact, the drilled and disciplined "automaton"—a soldier, an office worker who has submitted to the organization in the name of "team spirit"—comes in for Hack's most savage critique. He writes: "In the case of one who has wholly abandoned himself to any form of dictation, he is quite divorced from reality. And that means he is quite divorced from himself. As a self-expression of his own life-power he has ceased to exist. He has, in fact, become a *complete nonentity.*"[74] Service to any sort of ideology, in fact ("capitalism and parasitism," communism, even charity), endangers the human being's ability to express his or her life-force. Thinking back to the example of the endless wrestling tournament with which I opened this chapter, Hackenschmidt's fear of drill demonstrates the same horror of repetition that he was disquieted by in Vienna.

Hackenschmidt's thinking sets him at odds with the world of physical culture. In his 1939 book *Fitness and Your Self*, he criticizes the British government's stated aim of improving the bodily condition of the people and creating an "A1 Nation," since the term itself "is a relic of the war."[75] Hackenschmidt's critique is a strong contrast to Eugen Sandow's nationalist rhetoric in *Life Is Movement*, or the far-right British physical culture publication *The Superman*, thus complicating the teleological association of physical culture with national aims and ideologies. His is an anti-disciplinary discipline; a form of bodily anti-training, which we might see as a forgotten origin of subsequent forms of praxis in performance.

Is it true that this philosophy came purely "from within"? Todd and Maxcy point to the possible influence of the "unfoldment" philosophies of Friedrich Froebel and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi—pedagogues who believed in the free activity of children as essential for development.[76] But the possible "influences" from Continental philosophy go much further. I have already pointed to the similarity to Sartre and other existentialists, with whom he shares a concern for living authentically. Like Martin Heidegger, Hackenschmidt is fond of creating German neologisms. Like Nietzsche and Henri Bergson, he is interested in memory, and connects consciousness to a vital impetus or *élan vital* (in Hackenschmidt's terms, "cosmic rhythmic energy"). One might take these similarities, what Douglas-Fairhurst calls "particles" of influence, as evidence of two things.[77] They confirm Hackenschmidt's place in a conversation, the history of Continental philosophy, and the fact that he, as a former wrestler, was unfairly forgotten by the academy. Or else they point to the derivative nature of Hackenschmidt's philosophy, that he was simply regurgitating the ideas of

others, a former wrestler grappling above his intellectual weight. However, I am not interested in intellectually validating (or invalidating) Hackenschmidt's philosophy. Instead, I propose that we can discover more about the relation of this figure to the performance of modern masculinity by examining the ground from which his thinking sprang, that is, the theater. Hackenschmidt was examining the question of "how to act," in both senses—in this way, his philosophical system makes most sense as a kind of performance theory.

To make this claim, I now turn my focus to his book *Attitudes and Their Relations to Human Manifestations* (1937). An attitude, in Hackenschmidt's writing, is a "bodily pose."[78] This draws on the sense of the word "attitude" meaning "a posture of the body proper to, or implying, some action or mental state assumed by human beings or animals", and its theatrical partner, "*to strike an attitude*: to assume [an attitude] theatrically, and not as the unstudied expression of action or passion." This meaning of "attitude," according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, predates our more modern sense of a mental disposition by at least 100 years.[79] Hackenschmidt argues that the body's attitudes are "directed by acquired memories of past experiences, and qualified by the human being's present assessment of his relationship with his surroundings, and the anticipation of future events."[80] An attitude, which we might also call a bodily act, takes into account the human being's self-value (self-representation) in relation to his environment. For example, "it would be useless . . . for a human being to attach a high value to himself as being able to jump, if his immediate relationship with the environment was that he had to scale a precipice five hundred feet high."[81] The book uses such vignettes to argue that the expression of human life-power must be on equal terms with its environment—an "instinctive" attitude, rather than "intellectual," "dictated," or "subservient" attitudes. Hackenschmidt gives the example of crossing a river. Here, the human can choose one of two options—swimming the river (self-reliance) or using a boat (self-reliance plus compensation). Crucially, training, drill, or dictation distorts the attitude the body will take. As he puts it in his notes:

> Training produces bodily disproportions and disharmonies, in consequence of which the bodily parts become unequally represented at [*sic*] the brain, all self-values, such as self-assurance, self-consciousness, self-control, spontaneous reaction to impressions from the environment, truthful behaviour, etc. etc. become interfered with; the blood flow, too, which is distributed indiscriminately and equally to every cell of the bodily system, becomes interfered with, it invests its flow in places, modifying the character of the bodily form and therefore all expressions and qualities of the human bodily system.[82]

The dictated human would swim across the river, even knowing the river was too wide, the current so strong that he might drown, as if it were not his free choice to remain on his side of the river forever, even though dangers there might beset him.

Attitudes and Their Relations is the most bodily based and least esoteric of Hackenschmidt's philosophy books. Advocating a spontaneous, instinctive, "supple and elastic" bodily attitude against a trained, drilled, or distorted one, Hack's performance theory resonates with a later tradition of "anti-training" in the theater. The word "attitude" has a long history in theories of acting. The seventeenth-century *beaux arts* meaning of the word was adopted in 1721 into dance by John Weaver in *Anatomical and Mechanical Lectures upon Dancing*: "Dancing is an elegant, and regular Movement, harmonically composed of beautiful Attitudes, and contrasted graceful Postures of the Body."[83] In the nineteenth century, the term began to appear in theories of acting. Charles William Smith's *The Actor's Art* (1867) recommends that the beginner actor "observe the attitudes and actions in paintings and sculptures of actors and orators," and "practise the attitudes and actions by themselves without words, in the same manner as a singer practises cadenzas, &c., apart from songs, and a dancer practices positions and steps apart from the dance of which they form parts."[84] Edmund Shaftesbury's *Lessons in the Art of Acting* (1889) goes further to describe hundreds of separate attitudes for the actor to study and practice, and Edward B. Warman distilled François Delsarte's system of "natural movement" and bodily expression into the book *Gesture and Attitudes* in 1892.[85] Despite Delsarte's emphasis on the mental nature of attitudes, the lexical nature of these nineteenth-century guidebooks demonstrates that "attitude" in such theories remained a set disposition that could be learned and "drilled."

The early twentieth century marked a striking shift in actor training, as well as a change in the valence of "attitude." Konstantin Stanislavsky's system of acting gradually shifted the nature of actor training from the rote learning of bodily dispositions to behaving truthfully within the given circumstances of the text. Just before World War I, the French director Jacques Copeau argued that "the actor always starts from an artificial *attitude*, a bodily, mental, or vocal grimace."[86] To combat such artificiality, Copeau's technique of the "neutral mask" sought to discover the attitudes naturally, from within. Using language that recalls Hackenschmidt's *Man and Cosmic Antagonism*, he writes: "A neutral organism expends only the energy required by the task at hand. Personalities expend that amount and something else besides."[87] Rudolf Laban, in his 1960 posthumous text *The Mastery of Movement*, linked Jungian psychology and physical gesture in his identification of six "inner attitudes" (near, mobile, adream, stable, awake, and remote), which represent a subjective disposition not *of* the body but *towards* an object or thing.[88] And in the late twentieth-century

experimental theater training of Anne Bogart (of the SITI theater company), "attitude" is an internal state the actor adopts (without attitude, one is simply a passive receptacle).[89] Following the citational network of "attitude" demonstrates how actor training, like the word "attitude" itself, has changed its very nature. This would, as Mark Evans argues, give birth to a new type of drama school, where "the rules for doing things poorly or doing things well, once enshrined in catalogues of gestures and attitudes, were now inscribed on the actor's sense of self."[90] In summary, actor training began to adopt methods to work from *within*, rather than submitting to prescription. Acting pedagogues began using language reminiscent of Hackenschmidt's anti-disciplinary philosophy: *freeing* the body, finding the *neutral* or *natural* body, and above all, *truth* ("it is easier to cheat and falsify than to speak and act in a truthful manner").[91] In one vignette from *An Actor's Work*, Stanislavsky's fictional stand-in, Tortsov, asks his students to repeat a scene from the previous day.[92] "When the exercise was over," the diarist writes, "Tortsov . . . told us that while our earlier efforts had been direct, sincere, fresh and true, what we had done today was wrong, insincere, and contrived."[93] The students protest that they had indeed been "feeling" it. Tortsov replies that experience was constant for every living being, but in their re-creation of the previous day's scene, they were following their memories of acting: "You followed a well-beaten track blindly, almost mechanically."[94] Instead, they would need to find a way to each time use "the things which sprang to life inside you, spontaneously, and were naturally reflected in action."[95]

Like Hackenschmidt in *Fitness and Your Self,* who is placed in the paradoxical position of prescribing exercises that would free the subject from "dictation," performance training in the twentieth century largely represents a kind of *un-training training*. We can sketch an entire constellation of this tendency—a constellation of theater-makers who wanted to escape the theater. It encompassed, for example, Antonin Artaud's raging against the passive, domesticated Western theater, and his zealous intention to remove all barriers between performer and audience; and the later "Total Theatre" experiments of Julian Beck and Judith Malina's Living Theatre (*Paradise Now!*) and Richard Schechner's Performance Group (*Dionysus in '69*), both of which were heavily influenced by ritual. It can be found in the Japanese dance-theater practice of Butoh, which has become highly influential in Western theater. Kazuo Ohno and Tatsumi Hijikata, the founders of the practice, aimed to create a form of dance more interested in the body being moved, organically, than the dancer consciously moving a body part. In Europe, the discourse of authenticity found its greatest expression through the director Jerzy Grotowski and those he taught and inspired (including Eugenio Barba and Włodzimierz Staniewski). Grotowski's idea of the "total act," for example, was a way of the actor "revealing, opening up, emerging from himself"; "the actor must not *illustrate* but *accomplish* an

'act of the soul' by means of his own organism."[96] As Evans writes, with specific reference to twentieth-century movement training, the discourse of the natural, authentic body (un-training training) attempted to "bridge the nature/culture divide. Into a body conceived as disciplined and culturally 'consecrated' would be inserted a renewed sense of the worth of the organic experience of the body, the joyfulness of the body in motion, and the possibility of transforming physical instinct and immediacy into art."[97]

By looking to anti-theatrical arguments *within* the theater, we can better understand how Hackenschmidt intended his philosophical work to be read. Consider a passage towards the end of *Attitudes*, in which he speaks of exercising with the "spring-grip dumbbell":

> Developments will have been imposed, for instance, upon the muscles of his biceps and chest. But these muscle-developments are not the free, supple muscling of the naturally unfolded body. The man does not carry them with spontaneous ease and grace, able to bring them into play with spontaneous vigour and elasticity, to produce beautiful, self-controlled and freely vigorous movements and gestures. Everyone knows the cramping effect of such developments, and has seen men carrying them as though they carried a burden, and seen the sluggish, laborious, stiff movements which result when they are brought into play. That is to say, the bodily system's attitude to the developments is one of resistance.[98]

Appearing at the end of a philosophical and theoretical pamphlet, we see the entanglement of an embodied practice with a system of thought. The spontaneous, natural, unburdened, self-controlled, and freely vigorous body that Hackenschmidt constructs was formed in his own practice. While "influence" itself poses a serious methodological problem for historiography, by attending to embodied practice and performances, we can see how conceptual formations were grappled with—worked out in motion. When we consider George Hackenschmidt's body of work through this lens, suddenly two things that seem very far apart—the popular entertainments of professional wrestling, and the "serious theater"—are suddenly the shared ground for a defining concept of the body, and masculinity, in the twentieth century.

"Just So You Might Photograph a Tree": Hackenschmidt's "Unaffected" Masculinity

In an article for *Health and Strength* magazine, the journalist Mary Nugent describes Hackenschmidt's posing: "George Hackenschmidt instinctively adopts easy, unaffected poses without a grain of self-consciousness: no

Fig. 11. George Hackenschmidt, nude in contemplative pose. H. J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, University of Texas at Austin.

effort to display this or that muscle; no straining; no distortion of any single part is evident in the beautiful photographs of him. Just so you might photograph a tree."[99] Nugent's description reveals a type of masculine trope—Hackenschmidt is a manly ideal that simply *is*, that rejects the idea of being constructed (see fig. 11). In this way, he is similar to the nineteenth-century American actor Edwin Forrest, whose "natural" and "realist" performances of masculinity were set against the more affected, polished, theatrical, and supposedly effete performances of the British actor William Macready.[100] And such theatrical constructedness—as I demonstrated in chapter 1—is represented by Eugen Sandow.

Journalists could not help but compare Hackenschmidt to Sandow, since both were major celebrities. An article in *The World* (New York) reads: "The Russian Lion is one mass of soft, pliable muscles, wherein he differs from the great Sandow . . . Hackenschmidt is not a manufactured strong man, he is a born strong man. . . . It is as different as 'genius' is from 'skill.' "[101] Hackenschmidt met Sandow several times, and admired him from one standpoint, but, as he made clear in an unpublished essay, he didn't think much of him. In it, he writes: "His legs were not proportionally strong to his arms, so was his neck to his bodily whole. His movements, too, *appeared to me to be rather effeminate*. His posing I liked."[102] This is not the only reference in the essay to Sandow's effeminacy: "Often, too, whilst walking through Piccadilly [with Sandow], I felt a hand, gently laid upon my shoulder. It was a *tender woman's touch*."[103] Here, we might see

this as straightforward, historically situated homophobia in relation to Sandow's rumored bisexuality and his "private exhibitions."[104] However, it is more productive to consider how the attempt to distinguish Hackenschmidt from Sandow, both by himself and by others, actually performs another form of masculinity in the early twentieth century, constructing an "authentic" masculine subject just as another embodied form was being born and circulated. While putatively "natural," this performance of masculinity equally relied on a kind of trained, theatrical subjectivity, and is intrinsically connected to these debates in theater and performance studies.

Stephen Bottoms's important article, "The Effeminacy/Efficacy Braid," points out that the twentieth-century separation between "theater" and "performance" was not only a division between theater as entertainment and performance as efficacy and the real. Rather, that disciplinary division was initially based on homophobic assumptions.[105] Citing a 1962 column by the performance studies pioneer Richard Schechner in the *Tulane Drama Review* (later, *TDR: The Drama Review*), Bottoms notes how the "for real/for show" dichotomy was set into action by a rejection of the "decadence" of commodity or entertainment theater. The column is a vicious critique of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and Schechner writes: "The lie of his work is the lie of our theatre and the lie of America. The lie of decadence must be fought. . . . The values of *Virginia Woolf* are perverse and dangerous. Self-pity, drooling, womb-seeking weakness. . . . I'm tired of morbidity and sexual perversity which are there only to titillate an impotent and homosexual theatre and audience."[106] Bottoms clarifies: "It becomes clear, however, that Schechner's outrage is built on the assumption—widespread at the time—that Albee, as a gay man, had 'in actual fact' written a play about two homosexual couples, thinly disguised as straight ones."[107] Note here the similar language used in Hackenschmidt's and Schechner's writing: *decadence,* and an emphasis on *truth* and *lies*. Similarly, Donald Kaplan in 1965 wrote in *TDR*: "Acting is dandyism at the service of theatre. . . . As such the actor has always been inclined toward excesses of homosexual emotionality."[108] We might hear echoes of Hackenschmidt's critique not only of actors, but of *sentiment* in this statement. Schechner and Kaplan's statements, for Bottoms, reveal the underlying prejudices behind *TDR*'s championing of the ritual drama of Grotowski, Barba, and other figures in the constellation of anti-theater theater detailed above. "Entertainment theatre," Bottoms writes, "is illusory, deceptive, decadent, perverse, morally corrupt, diseased, impotent, and homosexual. Ritual drama, or dramatic ritual . . . is real, truthful, pure, direct, moral, healthy, efficacious, and—at least by implication—normatively heterosexual."[109] Performance, or the *performative*, as J. L. Austin suggested, "does things" (with words or otherwise). In Austin's speech act theory, an utterance in the theater (pre-scripted and acted in the context of a fiction) is "etiolated," a word associated with the degraded,

decadent, or effete. In other words, the anti-theatrical critique is a feminizing critique: the theatrical man is not a "real man."

As will be clear from this book so far, all men are, in some sense, theatrical men, even those that reject the theater. As Bottoms points out, in the dichotomy of theater studies/performance studies, there is a kind of self-fulfilling logic by which "theater" continually refers to only the most conservative, conventional, and artificial events, and anything else—which takes place in nontraditional spaces, which is "radical," which pushes the boundaries of the form—is *performance*. But another way of putting this is that performance never really managed to escape theater. Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty never came to be as he intended; and Grotowski's work has become canonical for theater training, and companies influenced by his work headline international theater festivals. Even artists who supposedly reject theatricality—performance artists like Marina Abramović—rely on theatrical effects in their work. To return to Jody Enders's distinction, they *intend* something. Performance, therefore, names a desire to reject something that can never truly be rejected: the drive to show, to demonstrate, to catch the other's attention. Hackenschmidt's quest to free the body from dictation, to reject artifice, to live honestly and authentically in the present moment, could thus only ever remain unfulfilled and required a mise-en-scène of a different kind.

The unmarked and authentic masculine subject represented by the signifier "performance" should be seen in response to the theatrical and potentially queer dimension of the constructed masculine ideal that emerged with fin-de-siècle physical culture, such as the queer acts of training, bathing, posing, and grappling. It is therefore possible to reconcile Hackenschmidt's frankly homophobic writing about Sandow with the missing queer interval in his autobiography: his time in St. Petersburg with Dr. von Krajewski. As I have argued in previous research, the presentation of this primal scene is both highly homoerotic and yet entirely lacking in explicit sexuality.[110] In "The Russian Lion," Hack paints the scene: "There were often as many as fifty fellows in the club-room, some exercising while other awaited their turn. . . . Once their clothes were discarded, all social differences disappeared."[111] We might connect the paradoxically gay straightness of this pile of naked, grappling men to the homoerotics of other attempts to discover a kind of "authentic" masculinity, such as the sweat lodges of the mythopoetic men's movement.[112] We even see it in the shirts-off training sessions of CrossFit and other functional fitness programs (and their rejection of bodybuilding practices), and the shower hijinks and hazing of rugby. Sandow, the built and posed ideal body, becomes a figure whose abjection enables the disavowal of same-sex desire so that it might be indulged at the same time, just as the explicit displays of homophobia in 1980s wrestling (according to Henry Jenkins III) made possible physical displays that might otherwise be perceived as homoerotic.[113]

These dynamics in Hackenschmidt's philosophy and practice should not suggest that they arose in a kind of gay panic, a rejection of his youthful liaisons in the house of a rich Russian bachelor. Rather, the rejection of homosexuality and queerness is part of a broad rejection of the artificial, affected, and theatrical, which neither Hackenschmidt nor anyone was ever able to fully escape. By exploring how this practice-thinking arose from a rejection of the theater and placing it in a constellation of theater-makers who attempted much the same as Hackenschmidt, I have attempted to show how he might be seen in relation to a new way of conceptualizing the body in the twentieth century, one tied up in normative assumptions about natural, authentic, and real masculinity. This, I argue, is Hackenschmidt's central contribution to modern history. While prior historical research has demonstrated how physical culturists at the turn of the twentieth century were constructing a masculine ideal of the built body, Hackenschmidt complicates this reading, showing how *at the same time* there was already a rejection of this kind of masculinity as too theatrical, too artificial; and there was the concomitant creation of another form of unaffected masculinity that was equally as performed as its showier cousin. In this way, Hackenschmidt is not merely a Sandowlite, or the first pro wrestler, but a hugely influential physical culturist whose influence continues to be seen today in the dichotomy of functional fitness and bodybuilding.

Even if the functional, active, "authentic" masculinity Hackenschmidt was staging was ultimately tied into ideologies of power and privilege, we can still find value in his thinking. In 1925 in Vienna, Hackenschmidt gave a lecture on weightlifting, which he writes about in his unpublished notes. He said: "It is fundamentally wrong to pay more attention to the dead weight lifted, than to the living body that lifts it."[114] I come back to this quotation again and again as a weightlifter, reflecting on how my practice is part of a way to live, not an instrumental one that aims at transformation, or numbers, or beating others, even if all of these things come into it. When I first encountered George Hackenschmidt's philosophy, I was struck by its ethics and honesty, but I was also turned off by its polemical tone and esoteric cosmology. However, by reading his work as performance theory, in the context of a literary tradition where polemics are rife, his work becomes less polemical and more impossible in its aim, a "transcendence" that strives to but can never overcome the facticity of everyday life. For all his hatred of acting, Hackenschmidt forces us to think about how we *act,* how we might relate to ourselves and others authentically, even if this is ultimately impossible. Perhaps it is not "the Way to Live," but *a* way to live.

Chapter 6

✦

Mirror

Racial Impressibility and the Built Asian Male Body

In an article for the pop culture website Vulture, titled "How Zac Efron Got So Hauntingly Swole for *Baywatch*," the journalist E. Alex Jung interviews Efron's personal trainer, Patrick Murphy, about the actor's training regime.[1] Jung reflects on the consumption of bodies in the entertainment industry ("I can't help but take stock of our responsibility as cultural consumers in the abnegation of Zac Efron's body fat").[2] Buried in the discussion of Efron's impressive self-fashioning is a brief reference to another Hollywood star: Bruce Lee. Jung writes:

> Murphy explains that he and Efron wanted to create "the most ripped look we could achieve in Hollywood history." He adds, "When I said, 'Let's go for this Bruce Lee look,' he said, 'Yes, I love Bruce Lee. Let's go for it.' "[3]

Efron has cited Lee's influence in the past, quoting Lee to explain why he was able to swim with sharks without being bitten: "It goes back to that Bruce Lee quote, 'Be like water . . . If you pour water into a cup, it becomes the cup. You put it into a teapot, it becomes the teapot.' "[4]

The performative "reenactment" of the body of Bruce Lee—an Asian actor and performer—by Zac Efron, a white actor celebrated for his "All-American" good looks—embodies a complex entanglement of race, performance, and physical culture. Like the "superhero" workouts of stars such as Hugh Jackman or Chris Hemsworth, Efron (or his trainer) tells us *how* to get the body of Bruce Lee. But unlike Jackman or Hemsworth, the target of Efron's imitative performance was not a fictional character. I argue that Efron, the white performer, is marked as a *theatrical* subject, possessed of the agency and tools to perform Bruce Lee, who merely *is*. We see a similar subject-object relation in a slip of the tongue in Efron's discussion of his costar, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson: "It [the training] was as much of the character as it was the acting. I had to keep up

with The Rock. If he's The Rock, I wanted to be Bruce Lee."[5] Johnson, another actor of color (of Black Canadian and Samoan descent), is simply "The Rock," an iconic but ultimately static body, against which Efron, the pliable, malleable, transformable subject, can measure himself. Efron unconsciously calls to mind a racial hierarchy of transformability and "impressibility."[6] According to the cultural theorist Kyla Schuller, impressibility denotes the differential capacity for bodies to be affected; to be acted upon. In the nineteenth century, Schuller argues, racial discourses produced hierarchies based on the capacity to be affected and shaped.[7] "The racialized," she writes, "were assigned the condition of unimpressibility, or the impaired state of throwing off affects but being incapable of being affected by impressions themselves."[8] Efron claims influence from Lee without acknowledging Lee's own transformational capacity. In this way, we can see the racial thinking at work in article titles like "Get a Body Like Bruce Lee."[9]

Throughout this book, "theatrical masculinities" in the performance of fitness have highlighted the labor of artifice and self-fashioning as a potential site of transformation and resistance. In this chapter, I consider how this theatrical capacity may not be equally distributed among subjects, and that such unequal distribution is a technology of gendered racialization. The capacity for *mimesis* in physical culture (in simplest terms, the act of self-representation, or "putting-on"), which emerged in the late nineteenth century and is thus inextricably woven into the fabric of the present, is denied to those raced subjects who then appear backwards, regressive, or "stuck in the past," a key marker of Asian racialization for the past two centuries. The Asian American studies scholar Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns, drawing on the feminist theorist Lynda Hart, notes how the faculty of "mimesis" is denied to the Asian female body onstage, meaning that the sign is taken for "the thing itself."[10] This collapse of the acting body and its referent is also key to the gendered racialization of Asian men. As I will go on to show, anti-Asian racism throughout history arrests the Asian male body as an unchanging thing that simply *is*, incapable of acting otherwise than its essential nature.

Simultaneously, I explore physical culture and fitness as a place where the Asian male subject in the West negotiated and performed his masculine identity in relation to his ongoing racialization.[11] The gym is a complex site for Asian men, as the technology of normative (white) masculinity can be the thing that subjugates and marginalizes them, marking them as inadequate, effeminate, and emasculated. It can also be a means of self-expression, agency, and empowerment. However, as Nguyen Tan Hoang cautions, reasserting normative behaviors in a racially minoritized body does not challenge the systems of legal and material violence that led Asian men to be marginalized or effeminized in the first place. Hoang reminds us that what he calls "remasculinization" is "of limited efficacy because

it recuperates Asian American masculinity by subscribing to a misogynist and homophobic agenda."[12] The material stakes of this problem can be seen by the way in which "remasculinization" is activated within the toxic and often violent forums of the online "MRAsians" community: a pocket of the "manosphere" devoted to Asian "Men's Rights" proponents.[13]

I explore two case studies in this chapter: the Chinese American actor and martial artist Bruce Lee and the Japanese American weightlifter and bodybuilder Tommy Kono. Although both are cishet men whose consumption by the white gaze has meant their bodies have often stood as images of assimilation or remasculinization, I turn to the traces of their training that interrupt their circulation within existing discursive systems. The archival residue of Lee and Kono as performing subjects, I suggest, identifies a transformative labor of self-making within and in spite of racist appropriation. Thus, by reading together nineteenth-century racial discourse, Bruce Lee's mid-twentieth-century martial arts and physical culture writings, and the archive of Tommy Kono, a Japanese American who was incarcerated by the War Relocation Authority of the 1940s, I show how physical culture continues to be a central site for current negotiations of Asian masculinities.

2020. London, England

It's January and I'm looking through some old photos I've brought back to London after Christmas from a family trip to Xiamen, the southern Chinese city where my father was born. I remember leafing through these with my mother when I was nineteen. Among the family snaps of temples and tall buildings was a 4 × 6 postcard, the same size as the other pictures. The postcard depicted Bruce Lee, in flared trousers and a loose shirt, striking the gung fu "horse stance," and smiling broadly at the camera. "Where did we take this picture?" she asked me. "I don't remember those pants." The incident became a joke. I looked so much like Bruce Lee that even my own mother could not tell us apart. I was willing to play along, as the comparison signified positive things—large (read: double-lidded) eyes, a square jaw, thick black hair and eyebrows. Bruce Lee was an ideal of Asian masculinity that I was proud to emulate.

If I didn't look like Bruce Lee, then being called "Bruce Lee" would be intolerable. Perhaps it still should have been. It's one thing for your mother to make a genuine mistake, and another for a carload of white frat boys to yell "Bruuuuuccccceeee Leeeeeee" at you on the street. (Lee? They said Lee, right? Not Ree? No, I definitely heard "Lee.") To the white gaze, all Asian guys look like Bruce Lee or Jackie Chan or whatever Asian male body comes to mind. Anyways, my physique could never look like Bruce's. I'm three inches taller than him for a start, and today I'm a good sixty pounds heavier than him at his very heaviest. I may look like Bruce in the

face, until the shirt comes off. And yet, the comparisons never stopped. What does the white gaze actually see when it looks at Bruce Lee? When it looks at me?

An Asian Boy Looks in a Gym Mirror

The video depicts a young, skinny Asian boy filming himself with a smartphone while looking at himself in the mirror of a public gym. He flexes a slender arm and says in a Singaporean or Malaysian accent: "Oh my gosh, I am massive. I am massive. I am so massive. . . . This type of body will get you a hundred girls on the beach." He picks up a light dumbbell and performs some bicep curls: "This is how you lift."[14]

"Funny Asian Guy in a GYM" is a viral video, whose virality is intended to ridicule its creator, the Asian boy looking in the gym mirror and imagining himself to be bigger, stronger, and more muscular than he is. It is only one example of online videos in which the assumed incongruity of the Asian male body and the gym becomes the site of racial abuse—see, for example, "Asian guy gym fail epic gains technique," "Stupid Asian at the gym," and a compilation titled "ASIAN AT THE GYM WTF!" which collects numerous voyeuristically filmed clips of Asian fitness ineptitude.[15] The racialized stereotype that Asians are "out of place" in the gym finds its apotheosis in the thread "F**k all the asians in my gym" on the Bodybuilding.com forums. The post crystallizes all of the major stereotypes of Asian men: they are numerous and "taking over" ("Fuuuuu so many fuking asians in my gym I couldn't even do my session today"), they fail at the normal gestures of manhood ("doing the worst form I've ever seen . . . ever"), they are effeminate and emasculated ("doing weights a woman could lift"), and they are perpetually foreign ("barely speaking a word of english").[16] While some posts challenge the racist rant, others confirm the stereotypes and add others ("do you even rift?"), and some fall into the dangerous strategy of remasculinization to challenge the stereotypes ("op [original poster] is a phaggot [*sic*]"). These videos and posts show the intersection of physical culture and fitness with anti-Asian racism and stereotyping, both of which can be said to develop with the acceleration of industrial capitalism in the West.

Yen Ling Shek suggests that "Asian American masculinity is a concept that has been mostly externally defined."[17] Because "Asian" is a vague geographic signifier for an enormous continent consisting of Central, South, East, and Southeast regions, rather than an ethnic group, Asian Americans are primarily defined by shared experiences of immigration, discrimination, and racism, as well as misrecognition and the perception of ethnic homogeneity. The external definition of "Asian" as an ethnic and racial group took place through numerous acts of legislation, relating

particularly to the regulation of labor.[18] Broadly, Asian immigration to the United States, particularly from China, accelerated in the nineteenth century as "the rapid expansion of industrial capitalism in America . . . created a high demand for cheap labor."[19] Chinese immigrants were initially welcomed to the new frontiers of American capitalism—the California gold rush, the Central Pacific Railway—but they soon became proletarianized and disenfranchised as "coolie" labor. Furthermore, they soon faced targeted racist violence from white workers who feared being replaced, as well as acts of legal discrimination, including the 1790 Nationality Act, which denied citizenship to Chinese immigrants, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, and the Immigration Act of 1924, which shut down *all* immigration from those not eligible for citizenship. At the time, only white Europeans and people of African descent could be naturalized, meaning that all immigration from Asian countries was effectively banned.[20] Furthermore, "the Euro-American power structure deliberately denied Asians the ability to establish nuclear family formations" by excluding Chinese women, and making miscegenation illegal (a female citizen who married an "alien ineligible to citizenship" was stripped of her own citizenship).[21] Combined with the pushing of Chinese and other Asian men into "feminized" professions (cooking, waitering, and washing), this legal-political formation created a subordinated Asian masculinity through "racialized gendering."[22] Through anti-Asian campaigns, legislation, and racial misrecognition and homogenization, Asians in the United States have been racialized as alien, foreign, and non-white "orientals."

The consequences of this racial gendering mark East and Southeast Asian women as hyper-sexualized (virginal and submissive, or "dragon ladies") and Asian men as emasculated. "The Asian male body," Michael Park argues, "has come to represent the abandonment of 'authentic masculinity.' "[23] We find numerous examples of this across popular culture, including yellow-face performances in vaudeville and variety, anti-Asian cartoons featuring exaggerated "oriental" features, and characters from film and television such as Long Duk-Dong (played by Gedde Watanabe in *Sixteen Candles*) and Leslie Chow (played by Ken Jeong in *The Hangover*). Although East Asians in the United Kingdom have had a slightly different history, the shared history of sea-based immigration has contributed to similar stereotyping of British East Asian men as sexless and perpetually foreign. The British novelist Sax Rohmer's early twentieth-century fictional villain Fu Manchu, haunting the London port neighborhood of Limehouse, is a yellow-faced example of "deviant" Asian masculinity at once feminized and a threat to white women.

Asian American men's identification with an image that is constructed by difference, that is, by deviation from an imaginary schema that defines "masculinity" via a normative white model, produces a kind of splitting of one's consciousness. The (gym) mirror is thus, as David Eng suggests,

a key site for the "[psychoanalytic] drama of self-discovery" and its intersection with race and sex.[24] Eng draws on Jacques Lacan's notion of the mirror stage, in which the child aligns him or herself with the images of the "screen," the "cultural image-repertoire of external visual representations by means of which identity is constructed," and this identification is in turn socially validated by the gaze of the Other, in most cases, the look of the mother.[25] However, he argues, Lacan did not reckon with racial difference. When the screen is filled with images of white masculinity, Asian stereotypes, and Asian absence, the effect is a kind of shattering of self: "Without this collective affirmation [of the infant's identification with the image], the imago cannot be successfully mapped onto the bodily ego to produce any feeling of psychic triumph or self-sameness."[26] The subject is divided—even more than usual—unable to reintegrate his corporeal schema with his image.

Eng's reading suggests a conceptual solidarity with two other theorists of race: W. E. B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon.[27] In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois contends that African Americans experience a form of "double-consciousness," a splitting between one's sense of self and the image(s) held by others or the white gaze.

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.[28]

Du Bois describes the struggle between external images (stereotypes) and the self. Furthermore, anti-blackness can become internalized, damaging the Black subject's sense of identity. "This waste of double aims," he writes, "this seeking to satisfy two unreconciled ideals, has wrought sad havoc with the courage and faith and deeds of ten thousand thousand people."[29] What I find most useful, however, is the conceptualization of this experience as an embodied struggle: "two warring ideals in *one dark body, whose dogged strength alone* keeps it from being *torn asunder.*"[30] Du Bois suggests that the *integration* of the body is destroyed by the gaze of the Other, and this is articulated with even greater clarity in Frantz Fanon's critique of the universality of phenomenology. Drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of the "corporeal schema" (*schéma corporel*), Fanon writes: "In the white world, the man of color encounters difficulties in elaborating his bodily schema."[31] Describing the experience of reaching for a pack of cigarettes, he notes that his bodily knowledge of where the cigarettes are and how he will position his body to reach them is "a definitive structuring

of myself and the world—definitive because it creates a genuine dialectic between my body and the world."[32] In other words, the self is constructed in a dialectic between the body and its experience of the environment. However, what this phenomenological model does not consider, Fanon argues, is the embodied experience of *difference*, made clear when one becomes aware of being seen through a racialized gaze. Fanon illustrates this with a scene of a child yelling "Look! A Negro!"[33] In this moment of seeing-being-seen, the corporeal schema collapses, and is replaced by an "epidermal racial schema."[34] "I cast an objective gaze over myself," he writes, "discovered my blackness, my ethnic features; deafened by cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism, racial stigmas, slave traders, and above all, yes, above all, the grinning *Y a bon Banania*."[35] The stereotype, one can argue, impedes embodiment, preventing the formation of an integrated, embodied self. Look! A Negro! (*Look! Bruuuuuccccceeee Leeeeeee!!!*)

Can performance challenge the shattering of the bodily schema? Might it be seen as an act of reintegration? Let's return to the Asian boy in the gym mirror. On the one hand, the anonymous Asian boy is a figure of ridicule, as he *embodies* the stereotype. However, if we admit the possibility of irony and theatrical self-presentation, then the boy's flexing, curling, and hyperbole ("I am so massive") becomes an over-identification with the stereotype that leaves him powerless. The boy does not cover up his subordinate masculinity but flaunts it. Instead of the delusion that renders this video a racist meme, we might instead discern a theatrical pleasure in the boy's experience of his body in the mirror.

My contention in this chapter is that physical culture practices may offer the possibility of a reintegrated embodied self for Asian male subjects who face the white gaze. However, this integration cannot simply rest on building one's image in relation to white heteromasculine expectations. As Angela Liu writes with regard to the phenomenon of MRAsians, this movement "inculcates an impossibly narrow heteromasculinity upon itself. MRAsians . . . interpret racial justice as white male privilege conferred upon straight Asian American men at the expense of everyone else—and even the possibility of their own freer selves."[36] Asians in the gym do not challenge white supremacy if they are doing so as a process of remasculinization. In this way, this chapter joins Nguyen and other authors who have attempted to discuss alternative, non-hegemonic, resistant, and queer forms of Asian masculinity.[37] Accordingly, my case studies in this chapter do so not by conforming *to* a white masculine ideal but by demonstrating an agential, flexible sense of self in the face of white supremacy. Physical culture, then, offers a possibility of alternative, integrated Asian masculinities through the possibility of self-conscious transformation. This opening of the Asian male body as a porous, dynamic, and performing body challenges a racial discourse that has plagued Asians in the West for centuries: *unimpressibility*.

Racial Impressibility

In *The Biopolitics of Feeling*, Kyla Schuller forcefully demonstrates how affect, feeling, sentimentality, sensibility—all contained under the rubric of "impressibility"—were deployed by nineteenth-century biopower to construct modern notions of race and sex.[38] In the nineteenth century, she writes, "biopower coalesced within a conceptual field that understood the individual and species body, in its ideal form, to be a mutable entity, one that readily receives its shape and significance from the sensory impressions made on it."[39] Populations were racialized via a hierarchy of impressibility, which

> clearly distinguished those refined bodies that could be affected and move through time—and had absorbed the habits of civilization over the course of generations—from those animalized, unimpressible bodies mired in primitivity that could only affect, and therefore contaminate, the settler colonial nation.[40]

Schuller's text uncovers the forgotten histories that impact upon our modern notions of race and sex, such as the American school of evolution, which followed the discredited evolutionary theories of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck.[41] Lamarck's model of species formation through sensory stimulation passed on as inherited characteristics (rather than Darwin's notion of the survival of successful adaptations) influenced a model of racial thinking where "impressibility was the provenance of the advanced."[42] Specifically, "Asian people were frequently cast as overly mechanical and lacking in emotional development, qualities that rendered them too easily moved by others, particularly employers. Most visibly, Western white workers mobilized fears of Asian un-impressibility in their struggles against monopoly capital."[43]

This idea of the unimpressible Asian race can be seen in Western conceptions of Chinese civilization as static and unmoving. Hegel, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, compares China and India to vegetables, denying them even the faculty of animacy, let alone impressibility: "China and India remain stationary, and perpetuate a natural *vegetative* existence even to the present time."[44] Robert Kurfirst notes that John Stuart Mill similarly conceived of Chinese civilization in *On Liberty*. While Mill admired and praised China, Kurfirst argues, he also noted that "the order attained there leaves human beings 'cramped and dwarfed' and unable to develop fully 'their capabilities of comprehension, of action, and of enjoyment.' "[45] Jack London's short story "The Yellow Peril," published in 1904, uses another metaphor to describe Chinese stasis: "The Chinese has been called the type of permanence, and well he has merited it, *dozing* as he has through the ages."[46] By conceiving of "the Chinese" as a race of

unimpressible and thus robotic laborers, a distinction was made between free white labor and unfree, proletarianized "coolie" labor, which was expendable and useful for the most dangerous work. The "white working class" was thus reified in opposition to the threat of the coolie army.[47]

The discourse of unimpressibility has persisted in the stereotype of Asians who are perceived to be, as Sianne Ngai puts it, "silent, inexpressive, and, like Bartleby, emotionally inscrutable."[48] The movement from differential affective capacity (i.e., to feel, to be moved) to the register of emotion has a strong performative aspect. Because emotion, unlike affect, is a culturally determined practice, it requires social validation (an audience), and thus, when seen through the white gaze, differential practices of emotionality can reinforce determinations of inscrutability and un-emotionality of Asians in the West in a vicious circle. As Donatella Galella suggests, "the diagnosis of not expressing emotions enough is arbitrary and constructed, based upon an allegedly correct way and amount of feeling as dictated by white supremacy."[49] I suggest that it is not only *emotions* that are being measured in this discourse of racial impressibility, but *movement*—the binary between animate/vegetative states, the rendering of Chinese civilization as "static," "cramped," and "dozing." And as the division between coolie labor and free white labor demonstrates, it is not just Asians' limited capacity to move that is being articulated in this stereotype, but rather their ability to engage in *free, self-determined*, and *intentional* movement.

The dominant historical narrative of physical culture reproduces the discourse of racial impressibility, suggesting that it is a white, Western discipline that spread notions of empire onto the bodies of racialized Others (for example, as a civilizing technology of the British Empire).[50] For example, David Chapman's collection, *Universal Hunks*, features historical pictures of well-built men from around the world, including Asian men. However, the historical narrative suggests a one-way flow of transmission wherein physical culture, and muscularity in general, originate in the West and were introduced to other countries and peoples through (for example) missionaries and the YMCA. With reference to China, for example, Chapman notes that "those Chinese who interacted with foreigners or who had been to a university were the most likely to embrace *tiyu* or 'physical culture,' " and "Asian physiques got better and bigger as techniques and equipment used by athletes in Europe and North America began to infiltrate the countries of the Chinese diaspora."[51] Chapman's global historiography of physical culture is double-edged; on the one hand, the success of physical culture practices, demonstrated in the "transformed" bodies in visual media, challenges the static unimpressibility of the racialized Asian. At the same time, the Orientalist formation by which physical culture is an exclusively Western practice strips the built Asian male body of its agency. To become muscular and fit is to become Western and white.

Following Francois Cleophas's call for a decolonial historiography of physical culture,[52] we might complicate these early appearances of Asian male bodies in physical culture media. In 1900, Yukio Tani arrived in Britain at the invitation of Edward William Barton-Wright, the founder of "bartitsu," an Edwardian martial art combining boxing, judo and jiu-jitsu, and fencing, along with his older brother Kaneo and his colleague Seizo Yamamoto.[53] While Tani was initially engaged as an instructor, he soon left the employ of Barton-Wright and began touring the music hall circuit with the physical culturist William Bankier (Apollo).[54] Tani's brother and Yamamoto rejected the use of jiu-jitsu as mere entertainment and returned to Japan, but Tani remained in the United Kingdom for the rest of his life. Like other wrestlers of the period, the public challenge was the guarantor of authenticity for Tani, and in his case it took on a different, racialized dimension. A search of Tani's various challenges in the British Newspaper Archive demonstrates that he is frequently cited as the chief exponent of an ancient and unchanging practice. He is called "the celebrated Japanese wrestler" in the *Yorkshire Evening Post*, "the Finest Exponent of Jiu-Jitsu Ever Known" in the *Northern Whig*, and simply "THE JAP" in *The Era*.[55] Except for Tani's nationality/ethnicity and his wrestling style, these announcements do not describe him in any detail, although the *Sheffield Independent* writes: "It is interesting to note that Ju-Jitsu is about 2,000 years old. It is the gentle kind of Japanese wrestling. There are other methods which are now prohibited in the land of the chrysanthemum. With this it was not merely a game to test the leverage, balance, and quickness, but the methods were to kill or maim."[56] Along with the exoticizing and feminizing reference to the "chrysanthemum," the passage foregrounds jiu-jitsu as compatible with the British values of fair play (merely a game) while hinting at other, secretive techniques. While Tani is "THE JAP," his British opponents are described in greater detail. For example, Frank Strong, despite being the loser, is described as "a muscular athlete of some 13 st. The Londoner proved a skillful exponent of the ju-jitsu system and put up a real good trial lasting 6 m, 58 sec."[57] In other words, Tani's unchanging Japanese body, the static exponent of a 2,000-year-old system, is a foil for white British masculinities. It did not matter whether his British opponents defeated Tani. Rather, the bout itself demonstrated white impressibility—through the white male body's ability to pick up jiu-jitsu, face an opponent skilled in jiu-jitsu, or wrestle in a jacket (Tani insisted that all opponents wear some form of clothing, to replicate the Japanese *gi*).

However, Tani's legacy as a proponent of Japanese martial arts in Britain was significant and long-lasting, and the acceptance of his racialized body into the discursive network of physical culture demonstrates that on the level of the body, to some degree physical culture was *intercultural*. Owing to his association with Apollo, Tani appeared on the cover of *Apollo's*

Magazine of Strength, Skill, and Sport twice, in September 1903 and May 1904, wearing the jacket of his jiu-jitsu *gi* with bare legs, showing off his muscular development. *Apollo's Magazine* was obviously fascinated by the Japanese and featured other Japanese wrestlers on the covers, as well as full-page photographs of "Japanese soldiers," wearing *fundoshi* (loincloth) and posed to show their muscular development. This fascination did not preclude racial stereotyping, as demonstrated by the article "Japan and the Japanese: Social Life and Sports" by R. W. Duke, published in the February 1904 issue, which is full of racist language. Duke describes the Japanese as "diminutive and puerile," says that "in common with John Chinaman they shared the facial peculiarities of the Mongolian race," and calls them "the little yellow-skins of the 'Flowery Land.' "[58] However, Duke ultimately admires the Japanese, as demonstrated by a passage that deserves quoting at length.

> Some years prior to the Chino-Japanese War, it became evidence that the Jap was a *sensible* and discriminating individual, and very *adaptable* to European civilization in so far as it would materially enhance his country as a power. He *rapidly assimilated the virtues of Western ideas, but, unlike the negroid and other lower types of race*, his mimicry, if is can be so termed, discarded the dross and vices common to Western life, only accepting the good.[59] (emphasis added)

This passage evinces the racial discourse of impressibility, from the double meaning of "sensible" to the praise of the Japanese capacity for adaptability and assimilation (in contrast to the "negroid"). It establishes a clear racial hierarchy, while moving the Japanese "race" further up towards whiteness. But while this article is clear in its racial othering, sport and physical culture provided the grounds for genuine exchange, as demonstrated in an article by the weightlifter and wrestler Joseph Szalay, the founder of one of the first gyms in London. Titled "Impressions of the Great Match," the article is ostensibly a review of Tani's lightweight championship victory against Briton Jim Mellor, but it begins with an account of Szalay's friendship with the wrestler. "I take the liberty to call Tani a friend of mine," he writes, "though we only met twice. Those two meetings impressed me so much with the man's character that I could not help feeling a great friendship towards him."[60] He describes their first encounter at an exhibition at the Japanese Society of London: "the cleverness and possibilities of [*jiu-jitsu*], of yielding instead of forcing, impressed me."[61] Two years later, Szalay meets Tani again at Barton-Wright's bartitsu academy. He agrees to face Tani in a wrestling match and loses soundly: "'Go on! strong! strong!' he kept reiterating, as the perspiration rolled down my face, and go on strong I could no longer, and was quickly defeated. From that moment

I recognised in Tani a good-natured sportsman, worthy, from fellow or foe, of the highest esteem and friendship."[62] In contrast to the racial hierarchy of Duke's article, Szalay's account demonstrates how bodies might be affected by each other. Indeed, their friendship might be thought of as another historical example of what Leela Gandhi calls "affective communities."[63] Like the stories of South Asian and British friendships in the late nineteenth century that Gandhi documents, Szalay and Tani's friendship is formed through shared practice, rather than shared identity.

Bruce Lee

Bruce Lee's 1972 film *Return of the Dragon* (or *Way of the Dragon,* in Hong Kong) has a cleverly Fanonian opening scene. We see Lee as Tang Lung, looking uncomfortably at the camera, before the next shot reveals the camera's gaze to be that of a white woman. As Jachison Chan describes: "The white woman is so engrossed by Tang Lung's Asian face that her husband has to pull her away. . . . Lung becomes the object of her study, and this short scene encapsulates how racially marked minorities are treated by Europeans and Americans . . . as 'texts' to be read and analysed."[64] As writer and director of the film, Lee stages the shattering of his corporeal schema as the grounds for his performance of the body. In the scenes that follow, Lee engages self-objectification: the camera lingers over his shirtless body as he performs his morning exercises; his shirt comes off in every fight scene; and most famously, the film culminates in a homoerotic fight with Chuck Norris's character, Colt, in the Coliseum. Lee is desired by both women (Miss Chen) and men (Mr. Ho). Lee thus resists the shattering of the corporeal schema by the white gaze through theatrical self-presentation; welcoming and even inviting the white gaze upon his body.

For me, Bruce Lee modeled another way of moving, being, living as an Asian man in the world. But Lee's status as a representation of Asian masculinity has been debated. Chan suggests that his masculinity is "strategically ambiguous."[65] On the one hand, as the first globally recognized Asian male action hero, Lee clearly challenges the stereotype of Asian men as "weak." He is strong, muscular, and capable of tremendous violence. However, Lee's refusal of any romantic relationships in his films is part and parcel with the wider lack of sexual representation for Asian men, thus attributing to him an aura of "monk-like asceticism."[66] For the film scholar Celine Parreñas Shimizu, this duality is part of the way Lee "expands our measure of both masculinity and sexuality—beyond gender hierarchy and male power over women."[67] Shimizu argues that in his films Lee performs violence, but also expressions of vulnerability that demonstrate the consequences of violence; similarly, he refuses sexual relations, but also performs gestures of intimacy that "mak[e] legible sexualities

beyond sexual intercourse or promiscuity."[68] As such, his is a performance of "ethical manhood." The vehicle for this ethical manhood is Lee's body.

> Bruce Lee's body, in flexing its sculpted form, exposes these tensions. The notion of exposure is crucial as his body often ends up unclothed in juxtaposition, mostly, to clothed opponents. Exposed in his chest and his body are the strength required of him—the flexing, the folding, the stretching, the bending, and the sweating that come from the building up and releasing of strength.[69]

Perhaps the performance of his body on film, in its flexing, folding, and sweating glory has another meaning, suggested by the staging of self-exposure in *Return of the Dragon*. Perhaps the banal and "theatrical" reading—that Lee's bodily exposure was simply about "showing off," is more meaningful than it might first appear. In other words, might theatrically presenting the body be the entire point, indexing a dynamic, fluid mode of Asian masculinity?

Any attempt to interpret Bruce Lee without considering how he trained his physique is necessarily incomplete. By reintegrating his training into the "meaning" of Bruce Lee, we reframe his body from an "exceptional" specimen of Asian difference to a trained, self-invented, and impressible body. As Paul Bowman notes, a major part of the discourse around Lee is that he was "real" (in fighting and physique), which is similar to Leon Hunt's assertion that Lee "placed a new emphasis on individual, authentic virtuosity."[70] Often, there is a perception that Lee is not acting, but simply *being* onscreen. The discourse of authenticity (and rejection of theatricality and representation) was leveraged by Lee himself, as in this passage in which he critiques other systems of martial arts for their emphasis on existing forms: "Instead of going immediately to the heart of things, flowery forms (organized despair) and artificial techniques are ritually practiced to simulate actual combat. Thus, instead of 'being' in combat, these practitioners are 'doing' something 'about' combat."[71] "Being" in contrast to "doing something about" deploys a familiar performance/theater binary, with the latter, degraded state corresponding to representation or mimesis. Yet, as Bowman notes, the discourse of realness and authenticity in the context of Lee's race and cultural heritage can be a problematic "guarantor" of what Rey Chow calls "a deeply ingrained belief in the absolute originality and difference of 'China': a belief in an 'ultimate essence beyond representation' "—in other words, yet another manifestation of the static unimpressibility of Asian bodies.[72] Therefore, returning training, which I conceptualize as a theatrical act, to the "meaning" of Bruce Lee, establishes Lee as a theatrical subject.

In the late 1990s Lee's widow, Linda Lee Cadwell, granted access to Lee's personal papers to the Canadian writer John Little, who put together

five volumes published as *The Bruce Lee Library*. The fourth book, *The Art of Expressing the Human Body*, is Little's piecing together of Lee's bodybuilding program from notes, essays, training diaries, annotated clippings, and interviews with his contemporaries. The book is a commercial health and fitness/self-improvement manual, as well as a work of sports history. The oscillation between the researcher's voice of putting together Lee's training program and direct, to-the-reader address ("You'll feel better, have tremendous energy, achieve a state of total fitness, and look great") make for a strange document.[73] Yet, it is precisely this dual register that reframes Lee as a conscious experimenter with embodied techniques, which, the book suggests, can be picked up and experimented with by the reader, regardless of who they are: "Some individuals believe that unless you possess Bruce Lee's physical attributes, attempting his workouts and training methods is futile. I can only respond that this directly opposes Lee's own beliefs and, indeed, the laws of human physiology."[74] In other words, it repositions Lee as a researcher of bodily technique in a network and lineage of other similar, and mainly white, researchers.

Following Lee's own anti-theatrical views on authentic expressions of the human body, Little suggests that "muscles such as those that comprised the physique of Bruce Lee are the result of training for a functional purpose," as opposed to muscles "for show."[75] However, the idea that Lee trained only for action rather than representation is more complicated than it seems, as the two competing versions of Lee's physical-cultural primal scene demonstrate. Little repeats the official, mythical narrative. In 1964, while Bruce was teaching gung fu in Oakland, California, the Chinatown elders took exception to his teaching of non-Chinese students, and challenged him to fight their best fighter, Wong Jack Man.[76] Although Lee won by submission, "to his dismay . . . he discovered that he'd expended a tremendous amount of energy in the altercation."[77] He decided that he needed to increase his overall stamina, endurance, and muscular strength, and he "sought out the opinion of two trusted individuals who were not only his students, but more importantly, his friends: James Yimm Lee and Allen Joe," both of whom were experienced Chinese American bodybuilders.[78] On the other hand, Allen Joe himself, writing in the foreword to Little's book, tells a much more ordinary story. Eschewing the Wong Jack Man tale, Joe writes: "When Bruce first moved to Oakland, he was very skinny. After seeing the size of our [Joe, James Lee, and George Lee] bodies—three 'Chinamen's' bodies, at that!—I think Bruce's fierce competitiveness drove him to build up his own."[79] Joe attributes Lee's interest in bodybuilding to a kind of competitive jealousy over appearance, motivated by their shared racial identity. In one narrative, training serves a loftier function, while in the other, it binds an everyday friendship group. Both the mythical and the quotidian are probably true here, demonstrating the inseparability of self-presentation from other aims and goals.

The rest of *The Art of Expressing the Human Body* proceeds chronologically through Lee's refinement of his process, scripting a performance for the reader in which they might find themselves experimenting in much the same way. Lee read numerous articles and was particularly influenced by a study of the positive effects of weight training on competitive swimmers at Yale in the 1950s.[80] From there, his initial bodybuilding program is documented in a 1965 gym card from the Hak Keung Gymnasium in Hong Kong.[81] The exercises are heavily focused on the arms (biceps, triceps, and forearms), although he also performed squats, push-ups, and sit-ups. The focus on the exposed, "show" muscles (as opposed to the covered, "strength" muscles of the back or legs) somewhat belies the anti-theatrical view of bodybuilding demonstrated by his notebooks. Lee writes: "My muscles are developed mainly from practicing martial art [*sic*], which is different from training purely for big, bodybuilder-type muscles."[82] But were Lee entirely concerned with function, we would not have the pictures of him flexing at home that Little has reproduced (taken, presumably, as comparisons for his later gains).

Lee then experimented with other forms of weight-training, including compound barbell exercises, bodybuilding machines (the "Marcy Circuit Trainer"), and workouts with the heavy punching bag. "True to his philosophy of jeet kune do," Little writes, "Lee began a shedding process, discarding those exercises he felt to be unnecessary in order to get the utmost out of the minimum—Lee's definition of 'simplicity.' "[83] This conscious experimentation with his physique continued throughout his career and to the end of his life. Over a ten-year period, we see a change in both his practice of weight-training and his practice of martial arts. While in 1965 Lee was still practicing "forms" of traditional Wing Chun, by 1970, those forms had become so embedded in his neuromuscular pathways that they no longer needed to be systematically trained, and he primarily practiced circuit training.[84]

I suggest there is a kind of theatricality in the use of the gym as a space for self-experimentation and self-invention. In this, Little's book challenges the discourse that Bruce Lee was somehow "real," that is, not *acting*, incapable of mimesis. The revealing of Lee's chiseled, invented body in his films is thus the apex of a theatrical, constructed masculinity, one which, as Shimizu argues, suggest alternative possibilities for Asian manhood. But although the gym was a rehearsal room, it was also a stage, and this is shown with greatest clarity not in Lee's own films, but in the biopic of his life, the 1993 film *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story* (dir. Rob Cohen), based on Linda Lee Caldwell's memoir and biography *Bruce Lee: The Man Only I Knew* (1975).

In one scene, presumably based on a real incident from Lee's life, Bruce is studying philosophy at the University of Washington (in reality, although Lee did take philosophy courses, he majored in drama).[85] The

camera pans across a large open gymnasium where numerous white students are engaged in various activities—basketball, cheerleading—before alighting on Bruce (played by Jason Scott Lee), performing lat pulldowns on a machine. A group of jocks comes in, mainly white, with one African American member of the crew, and demands that Bruce vacate the area. Bruce does not leave, and the jocks hurl racial slurs. "Your kind don't understand English." "My kind?" "Yeah. Gooks, chinks, your kind. You guys killed my dad in Korea, you think I'm happy you stealing my gym?" The lead jock challenges Bruce to fight, and Bruce walks away, as the group laughs, only for him to turn around. "You coming?" he says, motioning for the jock to join him in the center of the gymnasium. The fight that ensues is a riot of physical comedy, less martial arts than slapstick. The jocks try to land a single hit, but Bruce is too fast, able to duck and throw them off balance. At one point two jocks run head-first into each other as Lee performs one of his signature flying jumps. Throughout, Bruce's character is cocky and funny. He over-exaggerates his Asian-ness ("so sorry," he says, in an extra thick Chinese accent, slowly taking his shoes and socks off before the fight), quips at the jocks ("good shadow boxing!"), and in general does *too much*. In other words, with its theatrical excess and showiness, the scene, taking place in the space of the gym, marks the gym as a space for theatrical self-invention. Bruce uses the jocks like training, as a way of working on himself.

Tommy Kono

In 2018, the Stark Center received the papers of the Japanese American weightlifter and bodybuilder Tommy Kono, donated by his widow, Florence, and collected by Professor John Fair. There were over fifty boxes, unsorted, and to this day they remain unprocessed, awaiting funding for a project archivist. I began making trips to the Austin campus primarily to sort Kono's archive—work that ended up being "reparative" in multiple senses.[86] My encounter with Kono's archive was deeply personal: here was another weightlifter who "looked like me," at least in that racialized way where a Japanese person can "look like" a Chinese-Filipino person. Against that background noise of racial homogenization, I conclude this chapter on Asian masculine self-making with Kono because his story demonstrates the political and national stakes of the Bodybuilder's Journey and its intersection with race, and offers a way to explore sporting performances as what Dorinne Kondo calls "reparative creativity": "the ways artists make, unmake, remake race in their creative processes, in acts of always partial integration and repair."[87]

Tamio "Tommy" Kono was born on June 27, 1930, in Sacramento, California. In 1942, at the age of twelve, Kono and his family were forcibly

relocated from their home in Sacramento to the Tule Lake War Relocation Center, one of ten concentration camps established under Franklin D. Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, spuriously to contain the "security risk" posed by Nisei (Japanese Americans) after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Kono's Bodybuilder's Journey has often been used to obscure the racist violence of the camps. According to his official biography for the 1952 Olympic Games, the camps transformed Kono from a weak, skinny, asthmatic child to a strapping specimen of American masculinity.[88] In the desert air of Tule Lake, his asthma was cured. Once so skinny that water would collect in the "hollows by [his] clavicles" while he showered, Kono put on weight.[89] And, the International Olympic Committee reports, "he found an unexpected form of happiness."[90] Two other internees, Ben Hara and Tod Fujioka, introduced him to bodybuilding, and then the sport of weightlifting. Kono went on to become America's most decorated weightlifter. As John Fair writes: "Tommy Kono was the only strength athlete ever to set world records in four separate weight classifications and was judged in a poll conducted by the International Weightlifting Federation in 1982 to be the greatest weightlifter of all time."[91] In addition to his two Olympic gold medals, six consecutive World Weightlifting Championships wins, three Pan-American Games wins, and 26 world records, Kono also competed in bodybuilding, winning the Mr. Universe title four times. He was featured on the cover of *Strength and Health* magazine several times, in August 1955 as a weightlifter, and in August 1960, April 1962, and May 1964 as a bodybuilder. On the cover of the 1964 issue, Kono poses triumphantly on the beachfront in his adopted home of Honolulu, Hawaii, flexing his left biceps, a broad smile across his face. In the accompanying article, he is positioned as an all-American hero, his weightlifting success consumed by a Cold War era sports narrative: "To the Russians, Kono is a marked man. Until the Red Samsons can defeat him, the Communist claim that the U.S.S.R. is the world's strongest nation will be open to question."[92] The article subsequently omits his wartime incarceration by the state: "Once an asthmatic weakling, Kono became 'Mr. World' in 1954 and 'Mr. Universe' in 1955 and 1957. He overcame this condition after moving to a desert."[93]

These uses of Kono's story perform a kind of national recuperative work—signaling that Kono's otherness has been (conditionally) accepted into the white body politic because of his athletic success. As Joshua Chambers-Letson argues, the concentration camps deployed "new juridical and social technologies of racialization that sought to produce Japanese American subjects as willing to accept and perform the simultaneity of citizenship and the suspension of its attendant protections."[94] In this manner, the way Kono's Bodybuilder's Journey has been taken up by majoritarian forces in the afterlife of the camps frames the camps as a necessary evil toward assimilation, with the unexpected benefit of transforming a skinny

kid into a champion athlete and an ideal of Asian American masculinity. This assimilationism sits uneasily with the tropes of resistance that Kondo notes are celebrated in the historiography of the camps.[95] As Kondo writes, "the concept of resistance tends to reinscribe a whole (always already masculine) subject, who consciously fights the power."[96] Yet, if what constitutes the Asian American subject is its melancholic inability to come to terms with its being already split, partial, unintegrated, then the trope of resistance might disregard how "what appears at first glance to be compliance or submission may produce unexpectedly subversive effects."[97] Kondo asks: "But what about those who just tried to survive? To stay sane? To put one foot in front of the other?"[98] Following Kondo's provocation, I want to ask, what about those who put their hands on the barbell and lifted, and lifted again? How might we see Kono's *everyday* practice and performances as a weightlifter and bodybuilder as minor acts of repair, on an embodied as well as a psychic level? How did Kono negotiate national ideologies and state violence in the gym mirror? How might Kono's transforming, breaking down, and building up of his body be read as what José Esteban Muñoz calls minoritarian performance?

In *Disidentifications*, Muñoz writes about Black, brown, and queer performers in the margins, who nevertheless negotiate their relation to a dominant culture that has excluded them.[99] Muñoz's thinking developed in train with the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who built on the psychoanalytic concept of reparation to explore "the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture—even of a culture whose avowed desire has not been to sustain them."[100] The "reparative" tendency, then, seeks to move past tropes of resistance to focus on how minoritarian people and communities sustain themselves and survive. Adopting a phrase from Nina Simone, Chambers-Letson describes minoritarian performance as "the art of 'improvisation within a fixed framework,' working within limited coordinates to make the impossible possible."[101] In the context of racial capitalism's "unjust distribution of death toward, and exploitation of, black and brown life and queer and trans bodies," performance, he argues, is a "vital means through which the minoritarian subject demands and produces freedom and More Life at the point of the body."[102] Kono's minoritarian performance, then, at the very level of muscle growth, might be seen as a small, sometimes imperceptible movement of freedom within the restrictions of carcerality.

One day in 2018, mixed in among clippings from *Strength and Health* and *Muscle and Fitness*, with no indication of its potential significance, I find a small, letter-sized envelope. The envelope contains two yellowing sheets of composition paper (fig. 12). On these documents, the teenage Kono has drawn an outline of a body (his body?) posed in contrapposto with the left arm flexing its biceps—a pose familiar to any reader of

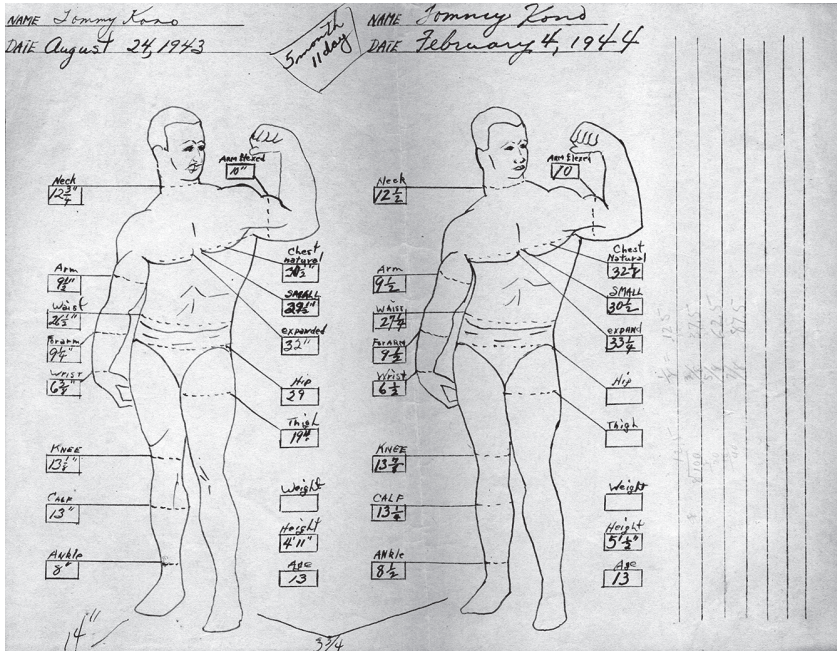

Fig. 12. Kono's training diagram from the Tule Lake War Relocation Camp. Tommy Kono Collection, H. J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, University of Texas at Austin.

physical culture. Diagrammatic boxes and lines point to each body part, with a measurement. It is possible that one of Kono's training mentors drew up these charts, but it is more likely that Kono created this worksheet himself, judging from a childish marking on the second sheet, which reads, "Copy Right [*sic*] 1944 by Tommy Kono & Co."[103] Over a period of sixteen months, the charts detail the expansion of Kono's body. Chest, expanded, from 32" to 37.5." Arm flexed, from 10" to 11." Thigh, from 19" to 19.5."

The measurement documents, on the one hand, are evidence of Kono's transformation in the camp, in line with the official narrative. On the other hand, the probable self-authorship suggests a self-reflective practice that Kono kept up throughout his life, as demonstrated by his training notebooks, distinctive wire-bound notebooks that document both his exercises as well as his mental and bodily states when training. The documents made in 1943–44, then, are the seeds of a process of self-knowing that underpinned Kono's later career. They mark a minoritarian performance of hypertrophic expansion against the restriction of carcerality as well as the bounded self. As discussed in chapter 1, hypertrophy in bodybuilding denotes muscle growth encouraged by purposive strength training

and progressive overload. But hypertrophy is always expansion within restriction: the expansion of the muscle is restricted by the fascia or bone structure; the expansion of the body is restricted by the externality of the organism as an individual in the world. In relation to the history of Japanese American internment, then, it is possible to read hypertrophy as an embodied expansion against the normative, assimilated racial subjectivity that the carceral state compelled the Nikkei to perform.

To go a bit further, I suggest that physical culture, for a racialized person like Kono, was a way of seeing oneself in a dialectic with the stereotype imposed by the dominant culture. Frantz Fanon calls this the distinction between one's corporeal schema and the "racial epidermal schema."[104] At the age of seventy-four, Kono gave an interview with Pennsylvania's *York Daily Record* that seems to confirm this reading. In it, he describes his first trip to York to train with Bob Hoffman and the York Athletic Club. "As I walked down the street," he says, "kids were playing in an open lot and they stopped everything they were doing to look at me . . . I felt so ill at ease, and these are only young kids. It disturbed the heck out of me. I swore that I would never come back here again."[105] But in the gym, Kono found none of stares he did on the streets. While Jim Seip, the journalist interviewing Kono, reports that Kono's lifting ability enabled him to be seen "only as an American," I suggest that lifting might also be a way of resisting the white gaze via a practice that enabled the reintegration of his corporeal schema.[106] For those of us who lift, we know that to master the snatch and clean and jerk is a long, complex process that requires the lifter to know their body, not in an unconscious way, but in a dialectic between the body and the material world: this bar, this platform, these plates, today. More importantly, it requires the lifter to see himself. To complete a lift successfully, the lifter must visualize himself performing the lift, while simultaneously feeling the internal workings of the body's muscles, joints, and tendons. This dialectic between externalization and internalization—that is, between the body's expansion and the limitations that contain it—is a minoritarian performance of resistance that challenges the drive to assimilate at the same time as it might seem to surrender to it.

What I see in the drawings Kono made in the camp is an attempt, through the practice of physical culture, at "reparative creativity." Central to Kondo's concept is the idea of reparative "mirroring," the making of racial, gendered, classed images of the selves on stage that have the power to "confer existence in the public sphere."[107] We can see this kind of mirroring in Kono's constant physical self-reinvention across both weightlifting and bodybuilding. It is a practice of body knowledge that challenges the "racial-epidermal schema" imposed upon him by the white gaze, which threatens to arrest the Asian body in a normative, racialized image.

Like Bruce Lee, Kono's physical culture practice was therefore a way to challenge a social racialization that rendered him a static, unimpressible,

and invisible object. By extension, we might see physical culture as a way that racialized men can resist such fixed images and reassert their embodied subjectivity. This is not to ignore the dangers posed by remasculinization. At present—in a moment when racially motivated violence against Asians in Britain, the United States, and Canada is resurging, in part due to stereotyping and conspiracy theory at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic—we also see what Angela Liu calls "Asian American hypermasculine ethnonationalism," not only in the dark corners of the internet, but on the streets, with Asian men openly marching with far-right groups like the Proud Boys.[108] Lee and Kono, whose own, individual approaches to masculinity were worked out in embodied practice, avoided this reactionary self-obliterating trap. In subtle ways, both men acknowledged the racial violence of their experience of the world, negotiating, through the body, the performance of their images into the mirror of society that might nonetheless misappropriate, misrecognize, or threaten to destroy them. This was not the loud, toxic theater of MRAsians, but a smaller, reparative performance, simply moving to say, *I am here*. As the Taiwanese bodybuilder and performance artist Frank Yang, whose videos have been both celebrated and denigrated by reactionary Asian men online, writes: "I body build in order to make sure that my body is still there."[109] When your image in the mirror has been shattered, physical culture may be to feel whole, even if repairing the mirror takes a lifetime.

2019. Austin, Texas

It's July, and Texas is sweltering. Every day, I ride my bike from my apartment in Hyde Park and take another box from Tommy's archive in the stacks. I separate out items by category—photos, magazines, legal documents, ephemera—placing each in a new acid-free manila folder, and those folders into boxes. I label the boxes. I feel privileged to do this. My professional and personal relationship with the Stark Center means I have unrestricted access to his papers, so I must take care. This is careful work but also the work of care. It's the kind of work—sorting family photos from takeout food menus—usually left to loved ones to do.

Each day when the archive closes, I ride back to the Hyde Park Gym and train. I start to incorporate Tommy's writings and guidance into my own training. I know I can never lift on the level of Tommy, but I can learn from the knowledge he recorded in his training notebooks. I can try to look like Tommy, incorporating bodybuilding into my strength programs. And yet, in seeking identification with him in this way, am I just affirming the homogenization of "Asian"? Sport and physical culture seem to always exaggerate minor physiological variation into racial difference. My coach is always talking about "Asian hip mobility," but does that really mean

that a 5'10", 200 lb Chinese-Filipino can one day squat like a 5'5", 149 lb Japanese?

But the broken nature of a racist society, where a white gaze would see me and Tommy and say we all look the same, also produces the grounds for small acts of repair. I look in the mirror and take a breath.

Coda

✦

Muscle Beach, 1934–1958: Prelude, Pause, and Utopia

It's November, just over a month after the death of my father, and I'm walking the two miles from the Santa Monica pier to Venice Beach in Los Angeles, California. This is a pilgrimage of sorts, to the site of an extraordinary experiment in the art of living that has occupied my historical and archival research for several years: the original Muscle Beach. I'd taken an Uber from UCLA, where I was staying in preparation to give a joint talk with a colleague. Bordered on one side by the Pacific and on the other by the I-405, Santa Monica truly feels cut off from the rest of Los Angeles, and indeed, everything else. The rhythm is different. There is less traffic. People talk to you while queueing for coffee. It is easy to romanticize the place as one of endless summer—and it's only fitting that Muscle Beach would start here. But on this November Tuesday the sands are empty, with a lone gymnast on a set of rusted parallel bars the only evidence that such things had ever taken place.

Across the six chapters of *Muscle Works*, I have attempted to think through the performance of men's fitness as an agential and theatrical practice of masculine self-representation. I have done so through a series of logics that organize sites in the archive where the historical framing of physical culture as exclusionary, neoliberal, nationalist, fascist, eugenic, patriarchal, homophobic, white supremacist, and so on might be troubled or challenged. If this seems rather optimistic, it *is*: as I stated at the outset, my aim in this book has been reparative, rather than critical. Instead, I have attempted to show how physical culture can forge new ways of being in a body, performing masculine identity, and relating to self and others, and how these conditions of possibility pulse under the surface of the archive. By centering my experience in these chapters, I have pointed to the way that, in training, one learns how to inhabit a body differently, and for those of us minoritized in some way, to perhaps reintegrate a self and image shattered by multiple exclusions. Critiques of fitness as

exclusionary, neoliberal, nationalist, fascist, eugenic, patriarchal, homophobic, white supremacist, and so on are everywhere anyways; and they are cited throughout this book. This academic gymbro doesn't presume to have the answer to undoing the interlocking systems of violence that suffocate us or the stranglehold that the colonial "descriptive statement" of Man has over us.[1] I offer this text instead in the spirit of encouragement, to the reader struggling under the bench press, the lifter going for a new personal best, to anyone standing outside the weight room or wondering how to use a piece of equipment, to those who attempt to hide, and those who don't, to anyone who is able to snatch a momentary glimpse of joy or freedom in a rep, or anyone who would like to, just to survive and get through the day.

Maybe I am falling prey to what Patricia Stuelke calls "the ruse of repair."[2] I am conscious of what David Eng discusses as the limits of reparation in light of "colonial object relations," where reparation "names the collective social and psychic processes by which love becomes a naturalized property of the European liberal human subject," creating the "differential production of the human through the affective distribution of precarious life, as it constitutes and separates good objects deserving of care and redress from bad objects meriting no consideration."[3] Yet in spite of these limitations, I am unable to let go of this feeling that in training we find something close to freedom; in an activity that can seem, from the outside, deeply carceral. Perhaps this is why we return to the gym, day after day.

In this coda, I explore the idea of such affective utopia through the history of the first Muscle Beach in Santa Monica, California, that existed from 1934 to 1958. This Muscle Beach is not to be confused with the outdoor gym in Venice Beach, made famous by Arnold Schwarzenegger, among others. The original Muscle Beach was home to male and female athletes who passed their time training in weightlifting, gymnastics, and high-flying adagio and hand-balancing. Muscle Beach, it is argued, was the birthplace of the mainstream American fitness movement. But I argue that Muscle Beach, which emerged in the midst of the Great Depression, in a period when unemployment in California had reached 28 percent, and one-fifth of all Californians were dependent on public assistance, was also an experiment in new ways of living, a temporary utopian space with the character of a summer holiday, but which nonetheless was sustained for twenty-four years, persisting in the face of economic depression and the Second World War. Muscle Beach was a queer space because it resisted both economic production (in that the training of the athletes was a spectacle for large audiences but was never remunerated in any way, unlike street performance) and heteronormative reproduction (its filiations went beyond marriage and family). It rejected what Elizabeth Freeman calls "chrononormativity," temporality defined by the normative rhythms of factory and family, and was a space sustained by desire, pleasure, and love.[4] In this

sense, the practices of Muscle Beach, specifically the formations of bodies held in temporary equilibrium, might be seen as a sustained experimentation with physical relations, which point to a polymorphous politics of queer kinship, relations outside the structures of "family" or civic duty. The practice of supporting, holding, and taking care of the other's body in the context of economic depression poses the question: "How do we hold each other in precarious times?" But the desire of the athletes, their attachment to a site they knew would ultimately be ephemeral, indexes the greater political potentiality of Muscle Beach to transform a *pause*, a moment outside of chrononormative temporality, into what Giulia Palladini theorizes as *prelude*, which is not a prelude to a concrete and knowable future, but an experience that "constructs a position for imagination, where pleasure not only supports, but establishes and enacts a thought of emancipation."[5] Moving through the history of Muscle Beach, in this coda I connect this mode of temporality to the work of the Todds and the Stark Center, before finally situating my own project—and its academic valorization—in this temporality of preliminarity and experimentation.

Muscle Beach Memories

In 1934, three gymnasts from Santa Monica High School—Paul Brewer, Al Niederman, and Jimmy Pfeiffer—began practicing gymnastics on a "hundred-yard stretch of sand" adjoining the Santa Monica Pier.[6] While other athletes had been practicing on the beach since the 1920s, it was with the influence of these boys, as well as Paul's sister Relna, coach Randall Hall, and acrobat Johnnie Collins, that the community of Muscle Beach began forming. Jan Todd suggests that several other events contributed to the site's formation, including the 1932 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, which spurred interest in gymnastics, the 1933 earthquake in Long Beach, which damaged the high school and canceled plans to build a boy's gymnasium, and the ongoing poverty of the Great Depression.[7] The athletes initially practiced on tarps and carpets, but in 1936, with the support of UCLA gymnastics coach Cecil C. Hollingsworth, the city granted reluctant permission for Niederman to build a 3-foot by 12-foot platform, which also included gymnastics rings and parallel bars.[8] Creating a sort of stage, the platform institutionalized Muscle Beach's "dual function of training facility and performance space," as Tolga Ozyurtcu suggests. "By 1938," writes Todd, "the number of people involved with Muscle Beach had risen to about fifty regulars, and the group's training sessions, particularly on the weekends, had begun to attract large crowds."[9] Training *was* performance. The athletes' work on the self was a spectacle for audiences, who gathered on the pier, eating hot dogs and cotton candy, and watching bodies in motion. The Muscle Beach regular Harold Zinkin summarizes: "By observing the

athletes' exercise routines and their impromptu shows, people picked up the not-so subtle message of fitness. Besides, it was *great free entertainment, something Americans needed in those days.*"[10] The Beach carried on during the Second World War, when many of the male athletes were conscripted and became physical training instructors for the army; while the strength and beauty of the women led to their images being used in Rosie the Riveter-style recruitment campaigns.[11] After the war, bodybuilders from across the country, including future Mr. America winners Steve Reeves and George Eiferman, moved to Santa Monica, and in 1947 the Mr. and Miss Muscle Beach physique contests began to be staged annually.

The economy of Muscle Beach was both precarious (in that it lacked long-term financial stability or regularity of employment) and mutually supportive and improvisatory, full of acts of gifting and mutual aid. The athletes barely made any money. In a 1948 article for the *Los Angeles Times*, Bob Myers writes: "The truth is, the financial careers [financial health] of beautiful specimens and weightlifters are sketchy. George [Eiferman] himself said he didn't have anything definite in sight, but would be interested in teaching physical culture, or a movie contract—or even wrestling."[12] When asked over fifty years later how the Muscle Beach regulars made money, George Eiferman replied: "Exhibitions, talks . . . there were certain fees we'd charge. Modest fees. To make a living."[13] Many athletes would make appearances at physical culture shows, high school assemblies, or work in Hollywood performing stunts, and posing for beefcake and cheesecake photographers, including Bob Mizer, the publisher of *Physique Pictorial*. Pudgy Stockton, who had a day job working at the telephone company, describes trying to book split shifts in order to spend the day at the beach.[14] It was only in 1940, when Vic Tanny opened a gym in Santa Monica, that the athletes came to have a semi-regular income, as many of them would both work and train there. Irregular gigs and shifts at Tanny's gym sustained the athletes enough that they could maintain the daily business of idle training at the beach. Steve Reeves, by far the most successful Muscle Beach alumnus, described the scene in a 2000 interview: "I'd get up in the morning, I don't know, about 7:00, 'cause I can't sleep too late anyway, and go to the beach. Just hang around for a little bit. Then go to the gym and work out for a couple hours. We'll say from 8–10. Then back to the beach for the rest of the day."[15] The gang would survive "on a dollar a day for food," cottage cheese and tuna, with occasional trips to "the Roundup," a buffet restaurant, "all you could eat for a buck and a half."[16] Reeves, Eiferman, and others lived at "Muscle House," the home of Joy Cortez, a woman in her seventies who opened her home to bodybuilders and gymnasts. By contrast, Eiferman notes, after Muscle Beach's closure, the weightlifting coach Bob Hoffman offered Eiferman $100 per month to train at his facility in York, Pennsylvania. In other words, there was financial stability for athletes elsewhere. But Muscle

Beach was sustained by genuine desire and love—an extended holiday, or a temporary utopia, in the sand.

In 1958, the Santa Monica City Council unceremoniously closed the beach, and bulldozed the platform and equipment overnight. For years the bodybuilders, weightlifters, and gymnasts had had an uneasy relationship with the city, with the Santa Monica *Evening Outlook* dubbing them "sexual athletes and queers."[17] However, the tipping point, in most historical accounts, was a case involving five members of the American Olympic weightlifting team who were accused of statutory rape of two underage African American girls (the charges were dismissed, but Ozyurtcu points out that "the race of the alleged victims may have been a limiting factor in the court's efforts to prosecute the case").[18] By this time, many of the regulars had married and moved away, settling into coupled lives elsewhere, fixing the image of a temporary utopia in the sand of sexual athletes and queers in memory.

The legacy of Muscle Beach is typically considered to be its role in the birth of modern American fitness, owing to the symbolic importance of its Californian location, its icons like Steve Reeves and Pudgy Stockton, and the fitness careers of some of its participants after 1958, such as Jack Lalanne, America's first televised fitness host, and Harold Zinkin, who invented the Universal Gym Machine. Ozyurtcu defines Muscle Beach as a "liquid network" in the sand—in other words, a loose organization that enabled ideas to connect freely and randomly—which afforded a diverse group of athletes a space for innovation.[19] I would go further to suggest that it was not only a "paradigm for fitness"[20] that these women and men invented, but rather new ways of living, relating to each other, and being together.

Amateur Labor and the Economy of Attention

The precarious, informal economy of Muscle Beach was sustained by another, unremunerated economy of attention, the gaze (or glance) of casual spectators watching from the pier, eating ice cream, and passing the time.[21] Thus, the *play* of the Muscle Beach participants was consumed as spectacle by the impromptu audiences on the pier, and became fodder for photographers (compact 35mm cameras became popular in the 1930s, and photography magazines circulated images of Muscle Beach bodies as a popular subject for the newly democratized art form).[22] But the attention of these nonpaying spectators was inconsequential compared to the heightened physical experience of the practice itself. The athletes, while clearly aware that their training was spectacle, were not performing *for* the audience. As Harold Zinkin writes, "the tricks we learned, invented, and dreamed about would be tried over and over again until we were able

to hold a position for maybe a few seconds, maybe a minute. . . . If we got a few claps we figured it was a good trick. *But the applause wasn't our motivation*. It just told us that we were making progress."[23] In other words, while it is strange to call the Muscle Beach performers "amateurs," when they, having invented their craft, were clearly its top practitioners, their labor was indeed amateur, in the sense that it was sustained by love, or at the very least, *pleasure*.

Joseph Strick's short documentary, *Muscle Beach* (1948), captures this dynamic.[24] Shot in black and white, the film intersperses shots of the primary activities of Muscle Beach with close-ups of the audience's gaze. We see athletes performing tricks on the gymnastics rings, parallel bars, and balance beams. A young man sketches other young men sunbathing. Children play in the surf and on playground equipment, and watch young men and women working out with weights. A woman with bare legs and a striped blouse performs a deadlift in front of a group of suited men. A man performs bicep curls while an audience looks on from behind him. Finally, in the longest sequence of the nine-minute film, we see the famous hand-balancing and adagio acts. There is an endless series of bodies in different combinations and formations. A woman balances a man in a high hand-to-hand. A man balances another man by the feet who holds another man by the hips. Feet-to-hips; hands-to-chest; shoulders-to-toes-to-hands-to-toes. Count one (breathe), then *up*.

Hand-balancing and adagio had been popular in vaudeville and music halls since the nineteenth century. One of the most famous routines in adagio is the "Apache," which is meant to simulate a physical fight between a pimp and a prostitute. Take, for instance, the Apache of the adagio dancers Alexis and Dorrano, filmed by British Pathé in 1934. Dorrano swings Alexis by the hair, throws her over his back, and onto his shoulders. She in turn knees him in the groin and kicks him in the stomach. Recovering, he swings her around through the air by the leg and arm, before throwing her unconscious body over his shoulder and leaving. The dance is watched by a group of extras, supposedly patrons at a Parisian café, who look on, horrified.[25] With the decline of vaudeville in the 1920s, out-of-work acts passed their time on Muscle Beach and brought the partner-balancing and graceful poses of adagio to the athletes there, who innovated on and adapted the techniques.[26] The endless combinations of differently gendered bodies reframed what was most famously a representation of sexual violence by a man towards a woman into a subtly queer practice.

Harold Zinkin notes a spirit of invention on the beach, likening the acrobalance practice to a "game": "There'd be a little bit of a line, taking turns, doing whatever we wanted until we were tired. And we'd bounce off what other people were doing, or put combinations of things together. So you already had a game, you saw good things happening from people you didn't know" (see fig. 13).[27] The activity was virtuosic, in both

Fig. 13. Athletes at Muscle Beach, holding a tower pose. Wikimedia Commons.

the sense of being exceptionally skilled, but also in Paolo Virno's sense of a form of labor that is its own fulfillment.[28] For Virno, virtuosity is characteristic of a post-Fordist form of "immaterial labor," and thus was exploitable by the new spirit of capitalism that was emerging contemporaneously with Muscle Beach. However, the Muscle Beach participants' own reflections suggest another reading, closer to what Virno analyzes as "idle talk." Derided as useless, idle talk is communication whose "lack of foundation authorizes invention and the experimentation of new discourses . . . instead of reflecting that which exists, [it] produces states of things, unedited experiences, new facts."[29] Muscle Beach can be seen as corporeal idle talk, chatter and noise between bodies where new relations and ways of organizing emerged. "Everybody shared whatever they had," Zinkin writes, "without hesitation, and you'd do it."[30]

What emerged was a negation of the self in favor of collective experience. Zinkin later wrote: "I remember how, magically, as participants, we became as close as one body, each of us giving up any independent role

we originally felt."[31] Pudgy Stockton, in a 1998 videotaped interview with Jan Todd, describes performing a high hand-to-hand—a trick in which the base holds the flyer in a handstand with his outstretched arms—with a visiting vaudeville artist: "He did a handstand, in a high hand-to-hand on me, and I tell ya, it was just like . . . [*pause, tuts*] I can't describe it. It was just like, it was [*pause*] *part of me.*"[32] As Pudgy says this, a smile crosses her face, and her hands reach into the air. We see a pulse of energy as she gropes for the remembered lock-out of the arms, the weight of supporting this man in the air, nearly sixty years earlier. Jan asks Pudgy if she remembers his name. Pudgy replies: "Oh no, I don't . . . I don't remember any of those names."[33] Through the fog of years, Pudgy recalls the embodied experience with clarity and liveliness, even though the formal identities of the participants have long faded. In a sense, then, the physical practice of acrobalance, adagio, and hand-balancing on Muscle Beach was a practice of heightened physical arousal, in which the body abdicates the self and becomes open to the presence of multiple others, outside of essentialist categories of (gendered) identity or normative lines of filiation. The sexual connotation of "arousal" is part of the point. Like aroused body tissue, the bodies of the athletes are in a heightened state of responsiveness to the other, represented by the firmness and tumescence of locked-out limbs. Muscles contract and fill with blood, veins engorge, bodies build new temporary structures upon the support of others. Like a hard-on, the whole production is precarious, and sustained by pleasure and desire.

Muscle Beach as Prelude

To what extent can Muscle Beach be considered a "temporary utopia," as I have called it? To what extent is Muscle Beach a "queer utopia," or what Muñoz describes as an alternative organization of social relations "in the face of hopeless heteronormative maps of the present where futurity is indeed the province of normative reproduction"[34]? After all, the image of Muscle Beach was squeaky-clean, all-American, and resolutely heterosexual—golden boys and girls engaged in healthy exercise in the California sunshine. In many ways, it was the very image of the heteronormative hypermasculinity against which Muñoz writes in *Cruising Utopia*, which "needs to be critiqued for the normative gender paradigms to which it subscribes as well as for the exclusionary logics it applies to people who do not make its normative (often white and decidedly masculine) cut."[35] For many, Muscle Beach was not a queer utopia but something much more dystopic.

I argue that what was both queer and utopian in Muscle Beach was not its visual content but its experiments in *time*; how its ways of living resisted a temporal flow that *ends* (in production, marriage, or even the

unified self). By marking this temporality as queer, I am not interested in "outing" the sexual history of the space, which many, including the journalists of the *Evening Outlook*, the Santa Monica City Council, and novels like Bud Clifton's *Muscle Boy* have already tried to do.[36] Instead, I read what is queer in what we can see—a spectacle of pleasure and invention in bodies in training. Before the question of bodies fitting together in the bedroom, the athletes of Muscle Beach were inventing new ways for bodies to fit together in public, or *as* a new public.

The embodied practices on Muscle Beach return us to Palladini's concept of *foreplay*, discussed in chapter 2. Palladini uses the term "to account for performances sustained by a labor of pleasure on the part of performers and spectators, and which exceed the frame of a singular event; performances not organized according to a climax, but which develop in an extended interval of leisurely enjoyment, and within a complex economy of attention and distraction."[37] She suggests how theatrical labor can be a work that is its own fulfillment, a practice sustained by the pleasure of doing rather than by economic value. Palladini calls this "show-idleness" (as opposed to "show-business"), an alternate temporality of performing that is "capable of resisting its always already forthcoming incorporation into capitalist production."[38] To illustrate this, Palladini discusses Tom Eyen's experimental play, *Why Hanna's Skirt Won't Stay Down* (1965). In the play, which takes place at Coney Island, Hanna, a 42nd Street ticket-taker, and Arizona, a muscular young man, spend all their time posing and playing *for themselves*. Hanna re-creates Marilyn Monroe's famous scene over a subway grate in *The Seven Year Itch*, while Arizona flexes his muscles in the *mise-en-abyme* of the carnival funhouse. Palladini analyzes this: "their labor of desire is self-accomplishing in its promise of entertainment, and is self-consummating. They do not play *for* someone, although they might happen to be seen by someone while they are playing."[39] At the end, exhibitionism is incorporated into the attractions of the fairground, "as if the destiny of incorporation offered in fact no possibility of escape."[40] And yet, "from within the productive economy in which, more or less voluntarily, they are exploited, Hanna and Arizona are also able to write their own narrative, to broaden the space-time of their pleasure."[41] Their idleness forms a "queer intimacy" between them.[42]

The practice on Muscle Beach might therefore be seen as a form of "show-idleness," with the athletes returning daily to the same stretch of sand to perform the same actions, subtly different, constantly innovating, but with no teleological aim but the act itself. In this economy of show-idleness, the gaze of the audience is really a glance. The eye of the audience comes across the act informally; it does not bestow value upon it, but neither is it inconsequential. The athletes and the audience form an aleatory theatrical economy whose unhurried temporality troubles the productive time of industrial capitalism. As Joseph Strick's film captures,

the performance of Muscle Beach was spectacular but strangely uneventful for the audience. The arrangements of increasingly precarious bodies in hand-balancing, the posing of increasingly perfected built bodies, and the lifting of increasingly heavy weights offer rising action but no climax. In hand-balancing and adagio, for example, the only possibility of an ending is the careful dismantling of the structure or it falling to the ground, a resolution that constantly denies the audience catharsis. Refused the resolution of narrative or drama (Dorrano flinging the unconscious Alexis over his shoulder to end the Apache), the audience is pulled into a queer temporality of unhurried pleasures, watching a "performance which never quite had a beginning, and perhaps will therefore never quite have an end."[43] The decision for performer or audience to return to the space-time of factory and family—to end the holiday—was one's own, rather than dictated by the end of the performance. If one returned the next day, it would still be there.

The athletes of Muscle Beach might therefore be a forgotten example of Nick Ridout's "passionate amateur": "those who work together for the production of value for one another (for love, that is, rather than money) in ways that refuse—sometimes rather quietly and perhaps even ineffectually—the division of labor that obtains under capitalism as usual."[44] Put more plainly, the amateur is an amateur because she is *not* professional. Her amateur performance is thus defined not because it is clumsy or bad, but because it is opposed to the work of the "professional" (who makes a living from performance) as well as the work "she herself does to make a living."[45] Within that relation, "the amateur acts out of love . . . making an unconditional commitment that affirms its own autonomy."[46] For the Muscle Beach athletes, their activities on the sand were always opposed to what Marx calls "the realm of necessity"; either the possibility of economic participation—professional work in Hollywood or onstage; opening gyms and becoming instructors; military service—or social reproduction—getting married and starting families.[47] They instead chose to act in "the realm of freedom," returning each day to the same beach in order to preserve their practice, their labor of pleasure, for as long as possible. Therefore Muscle Beach has a quality of a queer utopia, however temporary. In the images of bodies preserved forever in motion, in the struggle and tension of the arms, legs, and core captured by Strick's film, we see an effort to linger in the movement of the dialectic, between chaos and formation, between flesh and not, singular, coupled, group.

Twenty-four years is a long time to postpone the end of summer, and this suggests that the athletes sought, in some way, to transform the *pause,* a temporary escape from the normal everyday (like a holiday), into *prelude*, a temporality of its own. Palladini suggests that the prelude, a classical music form that originated as an introduction to the themes and motifs of a larger work, but which eventually developed into an aesthetic form

in its own right, might be understood as a structure for political action, because it helps us understand what *moves* production itself, or rather the desire to produce, which she understands in an expanded sense to mean something akin to "world-making." The prelude, like foreplay, lingers in the pleasure of introduction, anticipation, and promise, but "mocks" the idea that such pleasure must be valorized by an "outcome," an end.[48] The prelude opens up "pleasure as the creative matter where a polis can exist, where a different measure could be invented," measures that were figured in Muscle Beach through friendships, assemblages, solidarities, relations.[49] What is radical about Muscle Beach is the way the precarious assemblages of bodies, the embodied risks, point to what mattered for the participants, to what they desired. Put another way, the Muscle Beach archive shows how an embodied practice organizes a desire to sustain an alternative way of living that we can sometimes only perceive in hauntings, traces, a lone body in Santa Monica whose physical work calls into being a network of others.

I am wary of romanticizing the resistant potential of Muscle Beach as prelude; as the birthplace of American fitness, the political potential of Muscle Beach was quickly reincorporated by capital after its closure. In fact, one might argue, far from resisting capitalism, Muscle Beach was the spark for its embodied acceleration, a world of continuous self-optimization, Peloton bikes, and CrossFit. But just as, as Palladini writes, "the prelude has come to ultimately sabotage the structures in which it was originally embedded," might Muscle Beach not also point to other possibilities? If, as Arabella Stanger has pointed out, embodied practices can bear the traces of the structural violence upon which they were built, can the opposite not also be true, that is, might we not find traces of radical hope and alternative possibilities in images we find exclusionary?[50] By looking differently at the images at Muscle Beach, I suggest we see the utopian possibilities that urge us "to turn the present into the habitat of a force of pleasure that could support a desire for futurity, along with the efforts towards, and the persistence of a struggle for, a different futurity."[51] Perhaps, in practice, this pleasure is only found in a fleeting instance, a minute pause, a moment when the arms lock out or you stand from a back squat, but it is evidence of an otherwise that keeps us moving into the future.

Embodied Research and Queer Kinship

I didn't know about the original Muscle Beach until my first visit to the Stark Center. I'd confused it in my mind with Venice Beach. The astonishing images of high-flying acrobatics, precarious hand-balancing, graceful adagio, and classically built bodies were revelatory, so clearly influential to

our ideas of health and fitness, and yet forgotten by mainstream culture. What was more striking, however, was the personal quality of the Pudgy and Les Stockton papers, which were indexed professionally by the Stark Center but which Pudgy had already begun to organize late in life. Correspondence was filed under "meatball," "screwball," and "ego." Postcards from famous friends were lovingly saved. Johnny Terpak jokes to Pudgy: "Hi! This place [London] is pretty much like California—it's either cloudy or drizzling—never misses."[52] And Pudgy's own spidery hand or typewritten captions run through the files and folders: the work of an amateur archivist organizing her own life and memories. Or rather, her family history, for what the photo binders, scrapbooks, and clippings resemble most is a family album, or a genealogy project. While Muscle Beach never self-defined as a queer space, the Muscle Beach gang has the dynamic of a chosen family, a structure that has a long history in queer communities.[53]

Pudgy and Les Stockton, in one sense, had a heteronormative family life: Pudgy started dating Les when she was a senior in high school and he a freshman at UCLA. They married seven years later, in 1941, and in 1953 they had a daughter, Laura Jeanne.[54] In another sense, the family which Pudgy's papers preserve was much more expansive. Rather than the couple-form, what we see preserved are open and multiple connections to others. In particular, to Bruce Conners, with whom Les had formed a hand-balancing act at UCLA. Once Muscle Beach had been established, Pudgy, Les, and Bruce expanded the two-man balancing act into three, and made public appearances as "the Three Aces."[55] Three expanded into five, as Glenn Sundby and Wayne Long joined, and it became "Pudgy and Her Boys."[56] Just like the bodies organize themselves into a multiplicity of combinations and formations beyond the hetero- or homo-normative couple, so do the names, in the captions that appear in her photo binders:

> Pudgy and Les; Pudgy, Bruce, and Les; Les, Bruce, and Pudgy, Les, Pudgy, Bruce and Wayne; Glenn Sundby (on top), Pudgy, Les, and Bruce; Wayne Long, Bruce Conner, Pudgy Eville holding Glen Sundby; Pudgy Eville, Relna Brewer McRae, and Russ Saunders in a handstand. Our gang—about 1946. From left-back row: Ray Saunders, ?, Tim, McFadden, Swede, Moe, (next 7 unidentified). Second row: Eddie Motter's brother, Joe De Pietro, ?, Harold Zinkin, Karris Keirn, George Redpath, Bruce Conner, Walt Marcy, ?. Front Row: ?, ?, ?, Marion and DeWayne Zinkin, _, _, _, Pudgy Stockton, Irene Marcy, Audrey Saunders.[57]

As names fade from memory, the embodied experience remains. On a photo of Pudgy holding Bruce in high hand-to-hand, she has captioned the back: "Both completely locked out, for a change. Ha!"[58]

In the late 1990s, Terry and Jan Todd set out to capture oral history interviews with many of the original players of Muscle Beach, including Pudgy, Relna Brewer McRae, Steve Reeves, Russ Saunders, Glenn Sundby, Armand Tanny, Harold Zinkin, and George Eiferman. As interviewers, they are far from detached, scholarly voices. The tapes are like old friends reconnecting—swapping stories about their shared histories in physical culture, as befits interviewers who are legends of the Iron Game themselves.[59] During her interview with Pudgy, for instance, Jan describes beating her father on a "test your strength" machine at a museum on a trip to Chicago:

> JT: He was astonished, and I think, I was actually embarrassed about it.
> PS: [*Laughs*] You never want to be different than the rest of the people!
> JT: Nah, all my life, I always wanted to be a petite, small person. But I think because I was naturally strong, that's maybe why the lifting worked so well for me.

Despite Jan's suggestion, noted in the "Introduction" to this book, that her aim is "to tell the story of what really happened," I think the tapes show that their aim is not only to collect and preserve the "facts" of physical culture, but to preserve the way this history was lived, practiced, and felt in the body, and how embodied practice created relationships and friendships. I was always surprised at how many of the figures in the Stark Center archives the Todds had known personally. During my time at UT Austin, I passed afternoons listening to Jan's stories of meeting George Hackenschmidt's wife, Rachel; or Terry's recollections of Bruno Sammertino, the wrestler and powerlifter who passed away in April 2018. In the middle of one conversation, Terry received a call on his cellphone. "Ah, sorry. I'll just get this. It's Mark Henry."[60] I was moved by the way the Todds welcomed me into what felt like a still living history because I, as a weightlifter, though one late to the game, lived my research. From my conversations with the Todds, I began to learn that physical strength, which I had always been intimidated by, was not incompatible with kindness and empathy; indeed, the process of building it could be the start of opening oneself out to the world. I learned that muscle-building need not be only linked to vanity, or to "hegemonic masculinity," but could simply be a means of, as Jan put it, "enriching your life and appreciating what the body can do." I spent my days flipping through archive material, hearing these stories, and then, in the sweltering late afternoon Texas sun, I would ride my bike over to the Hyde Park Gym on Guadalupe Street and spend more hours communing with the barbell and plates, putting my body into patterns of movement and gestures that hundreds of men and women

had invented and perfected before me. I was a visitor to the gym, but the Hyde Park weightlifters welcomed me into their family, sharing equipment and knowledge, and we would relate through acts of correction that felt like care ("stay over the bar more," "bring your hips through," "not here, *here*"). And then I would ride home to my rented backyard apartment, eat tacos, and sit on the porch, writing or watching Netflix in the dying light.

Like the temporary utopia of Muscle Beach, this Texas holiday, a labor of pleasure, would also come to an end, this time upon my return to London and setting down my embodied experiences in the form of a book. On July 7, 2018, Terry Todd died at the age of eighty. A man who had devoted his life to physical culture and its history passed into that history. Writing this now, any attempt to pay tribute to his accomplishments and legacy seems inadequate to what has already been said.[61] However, I can offer what my friendship with Terry and Jan has taught me. History is not comprised of faded documents and photographs but is a story of living bodies. Our responsibility as researchers of physical culture is not just to tell the story, but to approach our subject alive to those other possibilities, narratives, relations, and ways of living that we feel in that history—and that so many before us did too.

On the Useless and the Otherwise

2022. London, England

It's the end of June and we're approaching the fourth anniversary of Terry's death. In September it will be the third anniversary of my dad's passing. I haven't been to Austin, Texas, since 2019—in fact, I've barely been anywhere. At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, fitness became an (even more) contested space, regulated by legislation. Here in the United Kingdom, it became a question of the proper use of public space: you could run or walk through the park, but stop to catch your breath and there was a chance you'd be fined or chased out by police officers.[62] *My gym was closed, all of them were, and it became hard to convince anyone that this mattered: what could be less essential during a pandemic than building hypertrophic muscle or gratuitous strength?*

In June 2020, protesters took to the streets for the Movement for Black Lives. As if on cue, the founder of CrossFit, Greg Glassman, published a racist tweet in response and was later caught "recount[ing] unfounded conspiracy theories about the death of George Floyd, and the origins of the coronavirus pandemic."[63] *He resigned as CEO of CrossFit soon after. It was as if the most hopeless understandings of physical culture were confirmed. I'd just changed jobs, taking up a senior position at a new university, where I was tasked with addressing historical racism in the theater*

and performance sector. I didn't expect the resistance I'd encounter, but my body was trained for resistance, I was strong and muscular from resistance training, so I resisted. I was dealing with my own shit—the enormous rise in racial violence against Asians in Britain, the United States, and Canada. Honestly, I was falling apart, but I pushed, I pulled, I did the heavy lifting. My team rolled out mandatory training for our colleagues on antiracism, microaggressions, and allyship. Then in May 2021, six East Asian women were murdered by a white man in Atlanta, and I experienced some of the most horrific microaggressions from a white female colleague and a staggering lack of allyship from everyone else.

The gyms opened back up and I went back. Five days a week: three weightlifting, two bodybuilding. I started revising this book. I wondered about why it mattered. I'd been working on this project since 2013, a lifetime ago. What did I want then? I wanted my research to reflect what seemed to be an increasing openness to doing gender, and by extension, doing masculinity in a different way. But the last few years have made me wonder what the point of a book about masculinity is, especially one so focused on what appears to be cisgender, heteronormative, and "ideal" masculinities. Do I need to list the reasons? Perhaps it's illuminating: Trump, Boris, Brexit, "Unite the Right," Jordan Peterson, Weinstein, incels, MRAsians, Proud Boys, the January 6 insurrection, the transphobic moral panic, the repeal of Roe v. Wade. *It goes on, and on. I'd been funded in 2016 by the Arts and Humanities Research Council to do a project about "new masculinities in the performance of fitness." Now, the potential of revised masculinities—being a little bit better—seemed hopelessly reformist. The world demanded an abolitionist praxis: abolish the police, abolish masculinity, abolish Man!*[64]

But I kept writing, and I kept lifting. In a crisis, it is hard to make an argument for anything that might seem useless, but it was those useless moments in the gym that kept me moving and got me back to my desk. I got jacked, I gained ten pounds of muscle, I started to rebuild the strength that the lockdown had taken away.

Hannah Arendt identifies three concepts of the "human condition" in her book of the same name: labor (subsistence and reproduction); work (production of things, i.e., poesis or "making"); and action (praxis). As Ridout notes, Arendt draws on the theater to understand action: "theatre being one of those places where people appear to one another and participate in action, and being also the one very specific place in which such action is reenacted, so that it may be collectively reflected upon."[65] *What I have tried to show in this book is that modern physical culture and fitness might be thought of as a theatrical practice outside of labor and work, born as it was in the nineteenth-century culture of popular entertainment. As much as it has been instrumentalized by military, industrial, and biopolitical interests, physical fitness is not really necessary for our subsistence*

or reproduction (Arendt's conception of labor), nor does it really "make" anything (her conception of work). We don't need to be fit. We don't have to lift weights, force reps, work to failure, pretend to fight, or learn adagio. Fitness and physical culture, like theater, is unnecessary, but because it channels our desire to act, express, and relate to others, it enables us to reflect on ourselves and who we want to be.

Perhaps it is in that uselessness that the "otherwise" of physical culture lies. Ashon Crawley talks about "otherwise worlds" felt, sensed, and imagined in the practices of Black Pentecostalism; Kandice Chuh—following Avery Gordon—invites us through Asian Americanist critique to "imagine otherwise," to "envision alternatives to acceding to demands for uniformity."[66] *In this coda I have looked at Muscle Beach as an experiment with an otherwise temporality, but it is also there in the figures I have encountered in the archive. Even though they invented our images of Man, in their bodies, their embodied practice, I was drawn to their self-invention as a space to imagine other possibilities. Upon uncovering Rothwell's socialist commitment, Hackenschmidt's philosophical mind, Sandow's ostentatiousness, and Tommy Kono and Bruce Lee's negotiation of racialization through self-knowledge, not to mention the many inventive and ridiculous ways strongmen found to feign strength, I admired the creativity and expressiveness of these men, who invented a culture and practice where there once had been none. The archive prompted me to think about how physical culture has been the admixture in which many of my most surprising and meaningful friendships have formed: intergenerational relationships of mentorship and care with a three-time Olympian in his seventies and a British champ in his twenties; a Scottish "family" of Muay Thai fighters; and the many men and women with whom I have shared platforms, equipment, and coaching cues.*

As much as physical culture and fitness cultivates an image, it forces us to confront ourselves, as bodies. When I step up to the barbell, I am confronted with my body as it is today: how does my hip feel, my dodgy knee, my strained trapezius? I must meet the gaze of others as I go through the motions in public. I must adjust my body, minutely, and therefore my image of myself. I must fail and realize that I am not what I thought I was. And then I must do it again. Every day, in the gym, as in the theater, I am given the opportunity to perform myself and reflect on that performance in the mirror. When I am audience to another person's performance in this public space, I have a choice as to how to respond. Dismissal and superiority? Or kindness and compassion? Each time I perform an embodied action in a public space, I can choose how I will respond to myself. This, I hope, is the otherwise possibility that the theatre of physical culture opens for the future: that the gym is, and will be, a place to meet ourselves, and ask who we want to be.

NOTES

Introduction

1. "Michael Pearman," Olympic.org, https://www.olympic.org/michael-pearman.

2. Earle Liederman, "'My Muscles Keep Me Young'—Says Sandow," *Muscle Builder* 2, no. 4 (December 1924): 28.

3. Brett Williams, "Simu Liu Trained to Get Explosive for *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*," *Men's Health*, May 19, 2021, https://www.menshealth.com/fitness/a36460972/simu-liu-workout-shang-chi/.

4. From the Ottley Coulter Scrapbooks, "Weightlifters," n.d., H. J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, University of Texas at Austin.

5. Ottley Coulter Scrapbooks, "Weightlifters."

6. What I will articulate in the book as "physical culture" refers to practices of bodily self-improvement in the West, though this designation already condenses some geographical and practical distinctions (the German *Turner* movement, for instance). For a comprehensive introduction to physical culture, see John D. Fair, *Mr. America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), chap. 1. In order to make my theoretical arguments, this book primarily focuses on physical culture in Britain, the United States, and France.

7. In using the word "otherwise," I specifically draw on work in the humanities that considers the performance and aesthetics of racialized subjectivities: see Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Ashon Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016); and Lola Olufemi, *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise* (London: Hajar, 2021).

8. Julietta Singh, *No Archive Will Restore You* (Santa Barbara, CA: Punctum Books, 2018), 22.

9. Singh, *No Archive*, 23.

10. The "Research Excellence Framework" is an audit of all research produced by British universities on a roughly seven-year basis, which determines each institution's share of QR (quality-related) research funding.

11. "About the Center," *H. J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports*, n.d., https://starkcenter.org/about/.

12. José Esteban Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts," *Women and Performance* 8, no. 2 (1996): 5–16, 7.

13. Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence," 6.

14. Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence," 10.

15. See Wilson Chacko Jacob, *Working Out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870–1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); David K. Johnson, *Buying Gay: How Physique*

Entrepreneurs Sparked a Movement (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021); and Erick Alvarez, *Muscle Boys: Gay Gym Culture* (London: Routledge, 2007).

16. Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence," 10.

17. Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: Routledge, 2011), 101.

18. Singh, *No Archive*, 27.

19. In *Pumping Iron*, Arnold Schwarzenegger likens the pump, that is, the feeling of blood rushing to a muscle that has been trained to failure, as being like orgasm.

20. "One-rep maximum": the highest weight one can lift on an exercise that day.

21. "Delayed onset muscle soreness": the stiffness that appears after a training session, usually the next day.

22. Singh, *No Archive*, 30–31.

23. Melissa Blanco Borelli, *She Is Cuba: A Genealogy of the Mulata Body* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 65.

24. Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 2.

25. Lowe, *Intimacies*, 40–41.

26. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 149–50.

27. Peter J. Miller, "The Imaginary Antiquity of *Physical Culture*," *Classical Outlook* 93, no. 1 (2018): 21–31.

28. Erwan Le Corre, "The History of Physical Fitness," *The Art of Manliness*, September 24, 2014, https://www.artofmanliness.com/health-fitness/fitness/the-history-of-physical-fitness/.

29. Jesper Andreasson and Thomas Johansson, *The Global Gym: Gender, Health and Pedagogies* (London: Palgrave, 2014), 18–24.

30. See, for example, the popularity of the "paleo" (paleolithic) diet with participants of CrossFit.

31. Haroon Siddique, "UK Is Most Obese Country in Western Europe, OECD Finds," *The Guardian*, November 11, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/nov/10/uk-most-obese-country-in-western-europe-oecd-report-finds.

32. National Health Service (NHS), "Exercise," May 5, 2018, https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/.

33. Heather A. Hausenblas, Katherine Schreiber, and James M. Smoliga, "Addiction to Exercise," *British Medical Journal* 357 (2017): j1745.

34. The term "toxic masculinity" has a somewhat problematic history. It originated in the mythopoetic men's movement of the 1980s and was initially an antifeminist term. The mythopoetic men's movement contrasted suggested "toxic" masculinity, from authentic, protective, "warrior" masculinity; the phrase arose as a response to the feminization of boys by second-wave feminism. See Michael Salter, "The Problem with a Fight against 'Toxic Masculinity,'" *The Atlantic*, February 27, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2019/02/toxic-masculinity-history/583411/.

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36. Stephen M. Whitehead and Frank J. Barrett, "The Sociology of Masculinity," in *The Masculinities Reader*, by Stephen M. Whitehead and Frank J. Barrett (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2001), 18.

37. Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 76.

38. Connell, *Masculinities*, 37, 77.

39. Connell, *Masculinities*, 54.

40. Iris Marion Young, "Throwing like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality," *Human Studies* 3, no. 2 (1980): 137–56.

41. Connell, *Masculinities*, 61.

42. Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 11.

43. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), esp. chap. 1, pp. 27–56.

44. Jennifer Doyle, "Sex, Gender, and Playing Sport Structures," in *Sports Plays*, ed. Eero Laine and Broderick Chow (London: Routledge, 2022), 76–80, 76.

45. Doyle, "Sex, Gender," 77.

46. David Brown, "Pierre Bourdieu's 'Masculine Domination' Thesis and the Gendered Body in Sport and Physical Culture," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 162 (2006): 162–88, 174.

47. Doyle, "Sex, Gender," 78.

48. Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1998): 519–31, 519.

49. Butler, "Performative Acts," 519.

50. Butler, "Performative Acts," 526.

51. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 21–22.

52. Butler, "Performative Acts," 527.

53. Rebecca Hardie, "Karen Finley's Performance and Judith Butler's Performative: Subverting the Binary Logic of Theatrical Functions," *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice* 31, no. 2 (2007): 94–102, 94.

54. See, for instance, Nicholas Ridout's book on theatrical "problems" that constitute the condition of theater: *Stage Fright, Animals and Other Theatrical Problems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

55. Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—an Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337.

56. Conor Heffernan, "State of the Field: Physical Culture," *History* 107, no. 374 (2022): 143–62, 144.

57. Muscular Christianity was a movement in Victorian Britain that promoted participation in sports to foster Christian morality and "manliness." It is often associated with the writer Charles Kingsley. See Donald Hall's edited collection *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

58. To avoid repetition, I will not give a full history of physical culture here; instead, I refer the reader to John Fair, *Mr. America: The Tragic History of a Bodybuilding Icon* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), chap. 1; Jennifer Smith Maguire, *Fit for Consumption: Sociology and the Business of Fitness* (London: Routledge, 2008), chap. 1; and Andreasson and Johansson, *The Global Gym*, chap. 2.

59. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health, and Fitness in Britain, 1880–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

60. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, "Building a British Superman: Physical Culture in Interwar Britain," *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 4 (2006): 595–610.

61. Joan Tumblety, *Remaking the Male Body: Masculinity and the Uses of Physical Culture in Interwar and Vichy France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

62. Shannon L. Walsh, *Eugenics and Physical Culture Performance in the Progressive Era: Watch Whiteness Workout* (London: Palgrave, 2020), 10.

63. See Harold B. Segel, *Body Ascendant: Modernism and the Physical Imperative* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); J. A. Mangan, ed., *Shaping the Superman: Fascist Body as Political Icon*, vol. 1, *Aryan Fascism* (London: Frank Cass, 1999); and Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, vol. 2, *Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror*, trans. Erica Carter (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

64. Susan M. Bordo, "Reading the Male Body," in *Building Bodies*, ed. Pamela L. Moore (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 31–73, 36–37.

65. Jean-Marie Brohm, *Sport: A Prison of Measured Time*, trans. Ian Fraser (London: Ink Links, 1976), 5.

66. Brohm, *Sport,* 34.

67. Brian Pronger, *Body Fascism: Salvation in the Technology of Physical Fitness* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 178.

68. Pronger, *Body Fascism*, xiii–xiv.

69. Susan M. Alexander, "Stylish Hard Bodies: Branded Masculinity in *Men's Health* Magazine," *Sociological Perspectives* 46, no. 4 (2003): 535–54; Federico M. Boni, "Framing Media Masculinities: Men's Lifestyle Magazines and the Biopolitics of the Male Body," *European Journal of Communication* 17, no. 4 (2002): 465–78.

70. Maguire, *Fit for Consumption,* 3.

71. Maguire, *Fit for Consumption*, 192.

72. Maguire, *Fit for Consumption,* 125.

73. Maguire, *Fit for Consumption,* 204.

74. Maguire, *Fit for Consumption*, 70.

75. Maguire, *Fit for Consumption*, 83.

76. Maguire, *Fit for Consumption,* 119.

77. Jacob, *Working Out Egypt*.

78. Ross D. Neville, Catherine Gorman, Sheila Flanagan, and Frédéric Dimanche, "Negotiating Fitness, From Consumption to Virtuous Production," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 32 (2015): 284–311, 289.

79. Roberta Sassatelli, "Interaction Order and Beyond: A Field Analysis of Body Culture within Fitness Gyms," *Body & Society* 5, no. 2–3 (1999): 227–48; Nick Crossley, "In the Gym: Motives, Meaning and Moral Careers," *Body & Society* 12, no. 3 (2006): 23–50; Lee F. Monaghan, "Looking Good, Feeling Good: The Embodied Pleasures of Vibrant Physicality," *Sociology of Health and Illness* 23, no. 3 (2001): 330–56.

80. Kenneth R. Dutton, *The Perfectible Body: The Western Ideal of Physical Development* (London: Cassell, 1995); Mark Simpson, *Male Impersonators: Men Performing Masculinity* (London: Routledge, 1994), chap. 2; Fair, *Mr. America*, 138; Johnson, *Buying Gay*; Brian Pronger, *The Arena of Masculinity: Sports, Homosexuality and the Meaning of Sex* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), esp. 165–76.

81. Richard Mohr (1992), cited in Bordo, "Reading the Male Body," 50–51.

82. Mohr, in Bordo, "Reading the Male Body," 51.

83. Alan M. Klein, *Little Big Men: Bodybuilding Subculture and Gender Construction* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993).

84. Niall Richardson, "The Queer Activity of Extreme Male Bodybuilding: Gender Dissidence, Auto-Eroticism and Hysteria," *Social Semiotics* 14, no. 1 (2004): 49–65.

85. Johnson, *Buying Gay*, ix, 3.

86. Johnson, *Buying Gay*, 11. It is interesting to note how this subtextual reading of physical culture still resonates today. Jane Campion's 2022 film *The Power of the Dog* features a scene in which Phil, a closeted cowboy played by Benedict Cumberbatch, flips through a stack of *Physical Culture* magazines owned by his mentor Bronco Henry. Their presence signals a queer bond between Phil and his late mentor, yet is still tied to a narrative of shame and secrecy.

87. Johnson, *Buying Gay*, 15.

88. Johnson, *Buying Gay*, 15.

89. Johnson, *Buying Gay*, 16 (figure 0.6).

90. Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence," 6.

91. Johnson, *Buying Gay*, 13.

92. Broderick D. V. Chow, "Epistemology of the Locker Room: A Queer Glance at the Physical Culture Archive," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 31, no. 1 (2021): 74–90, 81.

93. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 10.

94. Ben Spatz, *What a Body Can Do: Technique as Knowledge, Practice as Research* (London: Routledge, 2015), 26.

95. Spatz, *What a Body Can Do*, 43.

96. Carrie Noland, *Agency and Embodiment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 194.

97. Noland, *Agency and Embodiment*, 194.

98. Noland, *Agency and Embodiment,* 194.

99. Walsh, *Eugenics and Physical Culture Performance*, 7.

100. Walsh, *Eugenics and Physical Culture Performance*, 194.

101. Laurence de Garis emphasizes the importance of the sensual as a separate but important regime of meaning from the verbal in his important article "Experiments in Pro Wrestling: Towards a Performative and Sensuous Sports Ethnography," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 16 (1999): 65–74. I am also influenced by the theater scholar Giulia Palladini's methodology of conversations in leisure time, which informs her book *The Scene of Foreplay: Theater, Labor, and Leisure in 1960s New York* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017).

Chapter 1

1. Christopher Mulvey, "Gym Fascism," *Society for Cultural Anthropology*, April 15, 2021, https://culanth.org/fieldsights/gym-fascism.

2. Mark Townsend, "'Fascist Fitness': How the Far Right Is Recruiting with Online Gym Groups," *The Observer*, March 6, 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/mar/06/fascist-fitness-how-the-far-right-is-recruiting-with-online-gym-groups.

3. Oliver Lee Bateman, "The Unheard History of Bodybuilding Forums, as Told by the Trolls and Counter-Trolls Who Made Them Huge," *MEL Magazine*, 2019, https://melmagazine.com/en-us/story/the-unheard-history-of-bodybuilding-forums-as-told-by-the-trolls-and-counter-trolls-who-made-them-huge.

4. Michael Periloux, "The Politics of Bodybuilding," *Social Matter*, March 27, 2017, http://www.socialmatter.net/2017/03/27/the-politics-of-bodybuilding/.

5. J. Warshaw, "The Philosophy of the Superman," *The Superman* 1, no. 1 (October 1930): 7–8.

6. J. A. Mangan, "Blond, Strong, and Pure: 'Proto-Fascism,' Male Bodies and Political Tradition," in *Shaping the Superman: Fascist Body as Political Icon*, vol. 1, *Aryan Fascism*, ed. J. A. Mangan (London: Frank Cass, 1999), 107–27, 111.

7. Mangan, "Blond, Strong, and Pure," 114; Graham McFee and Alan Tomlinson, "Riefenstahl's Olympia: Ideology and Aesthetics in the Shaping of the Aryan Athletic Body," in *Shaping the Superman: Fascist Body as Political Icon*, vol. 1, *Aryan Fascism*, ed. J. A. Mangan (London: Frank Cass, 1999), 86–106, 91.

8. Pierre Cheville, *La culture physique pour tous* (Paris: Librairie Athletique de la Culture Physique, 1941), 201.

9. Joan Tumblety, *Remaking the Male Body: Masculinity and the Uses of Physical Culture in Interwar and Vichy France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 10.

10. "The Most Beautiful Athlete in the World." photograph (photographer unknown), Stanley Rothwell Papers, H. J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, University of Texas at Austin.

11. Tumblety, *Remaking the Male Body,* 10.

12. Tumblety, *Remaking the Male Body*, 130.

13. Tumblety points out that many reader testimonials start from the letter-writer's failure of the *conseil de révision* as the primal scene that catalyzes their desire for physical change. Tumblety, *Remaking the Male Body*, 130.

14. Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality," 257–337.

15. Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality," 260–61.

16. Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality," 305.

17. Wynter notes that the system of coloniality, although firstly imposing its violence on Black and Indigenous populations, also subjugates Asian nations and marks all "non-Western, nonwhite peoples" as only able to be "assimilated as honorary humans." Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality," 329.

18. Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality," 265.

19. Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality," 326.

20. Peter Marino, "How Bodybuilding Is Judged, Different Divisions, and Scoring," *BarBend*, December 7, 2020, https://barbend.com/how-bodybuilding-is-judged/.

21. See, for example, Coco Fusco, "The Other History of Intercultural Performance," in *English Is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (New York: New Press, 1995), 37–63; and Danielle Bainbridge, "The Future Perfect, Autopsy, and Enfreakment on the 19th Century Stage," *TDR: The Drama Review* 64, no. 3 (2020): 100–117. I would like to thank the second anonymous reviewer for pointing to this contemporaneous history.

22. Douglas Brown, "Foreword: The Historical Context of Seeing," in *Universal Hunks: A Pictorial History of Muscular Men Around the World, 1895–1975*, by David L. Chapman and Douglas Brown (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, 2013), 9–23, 19.

23. In one passage he cites the accounts of "the great explorers" (*des grands explorateurs*) that central Africans sometimes "consume nothing more than bananas for their daily nutrition" (*ne consomment parfois pas autre chose que des bananes pour leur alimentation quotidienne*). Georges Hébert, *L'éducation physique raisonnée*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Librairie Vuibert, 190-?), 6.

24. Patrick B. Miller, "The Anatomy of Scientific Racism: Racialist Responses to Black Athletic Achievement," *Journal of Sport History* 25, no. 1 (1998): 119–51.

25. A pseudo-scientific article by "Chad Stan" on the bodybuilding website *Spot Me Bro* about bodybuilding genetics is illustrated with a heavily stylized, cartoonish photo of a young white man and a competition photograph of a heavyweight Black bodybuilder. Chad Stan, "Good vs. Bad Genetics in Bodybuilding: Which Do You Have?" Spot Me Bro, July 30, 2018, https://spotmebro.com/lifestyle/best-genetics-in-bodybuilding/.

26. Brown, foreword, 20.

27. Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997), 148.

28. Francois J. Cleophas, ed., *Critical Reflections on Physical Culture at the Edges of Empire* (Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2021), 20, 38.

29. Michael Anton Budd, *The Sculpture Machine: Physical Culture and Body Politics in the Age of Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 83.

30. Ridout, *Stage Fright*, 33.

31. The word "hypertrophy" derives from the Greek *hyper,* "beyond, exceeding" + *trophia* "nourishment," and thus suggests an individual consuming more resources than is rightly available to them.

32. David L. Chapman, *Sandow the Magnificent: Eugen Sandow and the Beginnings of Bodybuilding, 2nd Edition* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 35.

33. Program for *Adonis, or, Ye Statue, Ye Miller, Ye Maiden, and Ye Lordly Villyain* (1894), Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/resource/varspbk.brpt24/?sp=1.

34. John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 24–25.

35. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan*, 25.

36. Jacques Derrida, *The Archaeology of the Frivolous: Reading Condillac*, trans. John P. Leavey Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 101.

37. Scrapbook, n.d., Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library. See also Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan*, 25–26.

38. Program, Trocadero, October 12, 1893, Robert Baral Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library.

39. David Webster, *Barbells and Beefcake: An Illustrated History of Bodybuilding* (self-published by the author, Ayrshire, Scotland, 1968), 15.

40. Fair, *Mr. America*, 84.

41. Fair, *Mr. America*, 130–31.

42. Fair, *Mr. America*, 131.

43. Dimitris Liokaftos, *A Genealogy of Male Bodybuilding: From Classical to Freaky* (London: Routledge, 2017), 81.

44. "The Art of Weight-Lifting," *Sandow's Magazine*, 1902.

45. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan*, 45.

46. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan*, 45.

47. Carolyn de la Peña, "Dudley Allen Sargent: Health Machines and the Energized Male Body," *Iron Game History* 8, no. 2 (2003): 3–19, 13.

48. Quoted in Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan*, 45.

49. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan*, 40–44.

50. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan*, 42.

51. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan*, 42.

52. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan*, 42.

53. De la Peña, "Dudley Allen Sargent," 13.

54. Chapman, *Sandow the Magnificent*, 105.

55. Chapman, *Sandow the Magnificent*, 106.

56. Chapman, *Sandow the Magnificent*, 108.

57. Chapman, *Sandow the Magnificent*, 108.

58. Thomas A. Edison and William Heise, *Sandow*, performed by Eugen Sandow, produced by W. K.-L. Dickson (United States: Edison Manufacturing Co., ?, 1894), video, https://www.loc.gov/item/00694298/.

59. Josh Davis, "Eugen Sandow: A Body Worth Immortalising," *Natural History Museum*, n.d., https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/eugen-sandow-a-body-worth-immortalising.html.

60. Davis, "Eugen Sandow."

61. Davis, "Eugen Sandow."

62. Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 12.

63. Roland Barthes, "The Diseases of Costume," in *Critical Essays* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 41–50, 42.

64. *Oxford English Dictionary*.

65. See Paul Solotaroff, "The Power and the Gory," *Village Voice* (1991), posted on *Bronx Banter*, http://www.bronxbanterblog.com/2013/10/01/the-power-and-the-gory/.

66. Adiposum Dolorosum, "The Sandow Fiend," *Sandow's Magazine*, vol. 4 (1901): 450. "Adiposum Dolorosum" sounds like pseudo-Latin for "Fat Sorrow" but also like the medical condition adiposis dolorosa, in which noncancerous lipomas (bumps of fatty tissue) form in the body.

67. Adiposum Dolorosum, "The Sandow Fiend," 450.

68. Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 96.

69. Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, 96.

70. Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, 114.

71. Darryl Chalk, "Contagious Emulation: Antitheatricality and Theatre as Plague in 'Troilus and Cressida,' " in *This Earthly Stage: World and Stage in Late Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. Brett Hirsch and Christopher Wortham (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010), 75–101, 75.

72. Michael A. Zampelli, S.J., "The 'Most Honest and Most Devoted of Women': An Early Modern Defense of the Professional Actress," *Theatre Survey* 42, no. 1 (2001): 1–24, 5.

73. Laura Levine, *Men in Women's Clothing: Anti-Theatricality and Effeminization, 1579–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 4.

74. See Phillip Stubbes, *The Anatomy of Abuses* (1583) cited in Bryan Reynolds, "The Devil's House, 'or Worse': Transversal Power and Antitheatrical Discourse in Early Modern England," *Theatre Journal* 49, no. 2 (1997): 143–67, 144.

75. Teresa Michals, " 'Like a Spoiled Actress off the Stage': Anti-Theatricality, Nature, and the Novel," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 39 (2010): 191–214.

76. Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, 343.

77. Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, 343.

78. Martin Puchner, *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 5.

79. Puchner, *Stage Fright*, 5.

80. Thomas Postlewait and Tracy C. Davis, "Theatricality: An Introduction," in *Theatricality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1–39, 5.

81. Tumblety, *Remaking the Male Body*, 204.

82. David Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace: Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in English Literature, 1580–1680* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 80.

83. Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 100.

84. Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 148–72, 168.

85. Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 153.

86. Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, 103.

87. Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 155.

88. Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 153.

89. "Bob Paris Posing Mr. Olympia 1988.mp4," video, 3:13, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfb75KJOaM8&t=70s.

90. Shawn Stone, "The Best Posing Routines," Carved Outta Stone, https://carvedouttastone.wordpress.com/2014/07/04/the-best-posing-routines/. Stone writes: "Paris' amazing routine in this Olympia posing to Tracy Chapman's 'Baby Can I Hold You' was an original choreography highlighting his perfect symmetry and classic proportions. Paris poses like a Greek sculpture come to life."

91. Fair, *Mr. America*, 279.

92. Artist unknown, *Sleeping Hermaphrodite*, http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/sleeping-hermaphroditos.

93. Michals, "Like a Spoiled Actress," 140.

94. I return to these ideas in chapter 5.

95. Niall Richardson, "Strategies of Enfreakment: Representations of Contemporary Bodybuilding," in *Critical Readings in Bodybuilding*, ed. Adam Locks and Niall Richardson (London: Routledge, 2013), 181–198.

96. Sianne Ngai, "Theory of the Gimmick," *Critical Inquiry* 43 (2017): 463–505, 468.

97. Ngai, "Theory of the Gimmick," 471.

98. See Richardson, "Strategies of Enfreakment." See also Niall Richardson, *Transgressive Bodies: Representations in Film and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2010); and Adam Locks, "Flayed Animals in an Abattoir: The Bodybuilder as Body-Garde," in *Critical Readings in Bodybuilding*, ed. Adam Locks and Niall Richardson (London: Routledge, 2013), 166–80. Women's bodybuilding in particular has often been considered through its disruption of gender norms; see, for instance, Leslie Heywood, *Bodymakers: A Cultural Anatomy of Women's Bodybuilding* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

99. See Erick Alvarez, *Muscle Boys: Gay Gym Culture* (New York: Haworth, 2008), 139–55.

100. Bob Paris, *Gorilla Suit* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

101. Benjamin Weil, "Macho Macho Men: The Queer History of Pumping Iron," *The Baffler*, November 23, 2021, https://thebaffler.com/latest/macho-macho-men-weil.

102. Weil, "Macho Macho Men," https://thebaffler.com/latest/macho-macho-men-weil.

103. Chapman, *Sandow the Magnificent*, 74.

104. Fae Brauer, "Virilizing and Valorizing Homoeroticism: Eugen Sandow's Queering of Body Cultures Before and After the Wilde Trials," *Visual Culture in Britain* 18, no. 1 (2017): 35–67, 38.

105. Chapman, *Sandow the Magnificent*, 74.

106. Mrs. Potter Palmer, quoted in Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan,* 57–58.

107. Chapman, *Sandow the Magnificent*, 74 (emphasis added).
108. Joshua M. Buck, "Sandow: No Folly with Ziegfeld's First Glorification," *Iron Game History* 5, no. 1 (1998): 29–33.
109. Buck, "Sandow: No Folly," 32.
110. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan*, 57.
111. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan*, 46.
112. Brauer, "Virilizing and Valorizing Homoeroticism," 55.
113. Brauer, "Virilizing and Valorizing Homoeroticism," 51.
114. Klein, *Little Big Men*, 194–233.
115. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Douglas Kent Hall, *Education of a Bodybuilder* (London: Sphere Books, 1989), 42.
116. Klein, *Little Big Men,* 197, 202.
117. Klein, *Little Big Men*, 194.
118. Karl Marx, "Theories of Surplus Value," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works, vol. 31, Marx 1861–1863*, trans. Emile Burns, Renate Simpson, and Jack Cohen (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2005), 21–22.
119. Michael Shane Boyle, "Performance and Value: The Work of Theatre in Karl Marx's Critique of Political Economy," *Theatre Survey* 58, no. 1 (2017): 3–23, 12.
120. Marx, "Theories of Surplus Value," 21.
121. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1993), 328–29.
122. Michelle Liu Carriger, "'The Unnatural History and Petticoat Mystery of Boulton and Park': A Victorian Sex Scandal and the Theatre Defense," *TDR: The Drama Review* 57, no. 4 (2013): 135–56, 139.
123. Here I am inspired by Rob Cover's suggestion that "there are lived performances and practices of heterosexuality that disrupt its overall coherence without dismissing heterosexual identity altogether, and thereby extend the possibility for a broader set of understandings of sexuality as complicated, diverse, and sometimes illogical." Rob Cover, "Visual Heteromasculinities Online: Beyond Binaries and Sexual Normativities in Camera Chat Forums," *Men and Masculinities* 18, no. 2 (2015): 159–75, 160.
124. Nicholas Chare, "Literary Veins," *Performance Research* 19, no. 1 (2014): 91–101. See also Nicholas Chare, "Getting Hard: Female Bodybuilders and Muscle Worship," in *Critical Readings in Bodybuilding*, ed. Adam Locks and Niall Richardson (New York: Routledge, 2012), 199–214.
125. Ridout, *Stage Fright*.
126. Dan Dietz, *The Complete Book of 2000s Broadway Musicals* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 95.
127. James Lapine and Stephen Sondheim, *Muscle*, June 11, 1992, New York Shakespeare Festival Records, Series III, Scripts, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library.
128. Scott Frankel and Michael Korie, *Muscle: Songs by Scott Frankel and Michael Korie*, undated (circa 1990s), the Michael Korie Papers, 1960s–2014, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library.
129. Sam Fussell, *Muscle: Confessions of an Unlikely Bodybuilder* (London: Scribner's, 1991), 22.
130. Fussell, *Muscle*, 48.

131. Fussell, *Muscle*, 54.

132. Fussell, *Muscle*, 54–55.

133. Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1998): 519–31, 523.

134. Rebecca Schneider, *Performance Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Re-enactment* (London: Routledge, 2011), 30.

135. Lucia Mauro, "Muscle," *Chicago Theater*, n.d., http://www.chicagotheater.com/revMusc.html. Mauro calls this casting decision "baffling and embarrassing."

136. Hedy Weiss, "Muscle," *Chicago Sun-Times*, June 2001, clipping, Performing Arts Research Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library; Richard Christiansen, "Pumping up the Volume," *Chicago Tribune*, June 2001, clipping, Performing Arts Research Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library.

137. Fussell, *Muscle*, 251.

138. Jonathan Abarbanel, "Muscle," *Windy City Times*, June 20, 2001, http://www.windycitymediagroup.com/lgbt/MUSCLE-Playwright-James-Lapine-book-William-Finn-music-Ellen-Fitzhugh-lyrics/25120.html; Christensen, "Pumping up the Volume"; Mauro, "Muscle."

139. Ngai, "Theory of the Gimmick," 493.

140. "Fernando Arrabal: The Body-Builder's Book of Love," *Estreno: Contemporary Spanish Plays*, Rutgers University, http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~estrplay/play15.htm.

141. Dominic Cavendish, "Gods and Monsters, Southwark Playhouse: 'A Stage Debut to Ogle at,'" *The Daily Telegraph*, February 16, 2015, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/11409369/Gods-and-Monsters-Southwark-Playhouse-a-stage-debut-to-ogle-at.html.

142. "Theatre Review: Gods and Monsters," *Partially Obstructed View*, February 13, 2015, http://partially-obstructed-view.blogspot.co.uk/2015/02/theatre-review-gods-and-monsters.html.

143. RevStan, "Review: Gods and Monsters (and Men in the Buff), Southwark Playhouse," *Rev Stan's Theatre Blog*, http://theatre.revstan.com/2015/02/review-gods-and-monsters-southwark-playhouse.html.

144. Aoife Monks, *The Actor in Costume* (London: Palgrave, 2009), 100–101.

145. See Heywood, *Bodymakers*; and Tanya Bunsell and Chris Shilling, "Outside and Inside the Gym: Exploring the Identity of the Female Bodybuilder," in *Critical Readings in Bodybuilding*, ed. Adam Locks and Niall Richardson (New York: Routledge, 2012), 58–72.

146. Martin Puchner, "Modernism and Anti-Theatricality: An Afterword," *Modern Drama* 44, no. 3 (2001): 355–61, 359.

147. Adam Szetela, "The Anticapitalist Bodybuilder," *Jacobin*, March 6, 2017, https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/03/bodybuilding-arnold-sports-festival-taylorism-ymca-roosevelt-sports.

148. Oliver Bateman, "Steroid Solidarity: The Culture of Juicing at the Mr. Olympic Competition," *Virginia Quarterly Review*, Summer 2017, http://www.vqronline.org/reporting-articles/2017/07/steroid-solidarity.

149. Michelle Liu Carriger, "ElasticiTEA? Preliminary Theses on Cross-Cultural (re)Presentation and the Japanese 'Way of Tea,' " *Global Performance Studies* 4, no. 1 (2021), https://doi.org/10.33303/gpsv4n1a2.

150. Jody Enders, *Murder by Accident: Medieval Theater, Modern Media, Critical Intentions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

151. Enders, *Murder by Accident*, 12.

152. Butler, "Performative Acts," 519.

Chapter 2

1. Eugen Sandow, *Strength, and How to Obtain It* (London: Gale and Polden, 1897), 89.

2. Sandow, *Strength*, 89.

3. See, for example, the "Six Feet Tall and Super Strong" challenge, where participants do this, soundtracked by Superfruit's song "GUY.EXE": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tqo_f_GurRA.

4. Kenneth R. Dutton, *The Perfectible Body: The Western Ideal of Physical Development* (London: Cassell, 1995), 101.

5. Dutton, *Perfectible Body*, 101.

6. Susan Leigh Foster, introduction to *Corporealities: Dancing Knowledge, Culture and Power*, ed. Susan Leigh Foster (London: Routledge, 1996), xi.

7. Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 95.

8. Rachel Hann, "Staging Trans Feelings: Tactical Atmospherics and Cisgenderism in We Dig (2019)," paper presented at the Theatre and Performance Research Association's Annual Conference, September 9, 2021, https://medium.com/@dr.rachelhann/staging-trans-feelings-tactical-atmospherics-and-cisgenderism-in-we-dig-2019–637100f21c7f.

9. Arnold Schwarzenegger, *The New Encyclopedia of Modern Bodybuilding*, 2nd ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 3.

10. Kate Nichols, *Greece and Rome at the Crystal Palace: Classical Sculpture and Modern Britain, 1854–1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

11. Maria Wyke, "Herculean Muscle! The Classicising Rhetoric of Bodybuilding," *Arion* 3, no. 4 (1997): 51–79.

12. The Robinson Locke Collection, 1870–1920, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library.

13. John Little, "Steve Reeves: The King of Bodybuilding," *Iron Man Magazine*, October 1, 2003, http://www.ironmanmagazine.com/steve-reeves-the-king-of-bodybuilding/.

14. Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire," in *Dits et écrits* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 143.

15. Susan M. Bordo, "Reading the Male Body," in *Building Bodies*, ed. Pamela L. Moore (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 31–73, 32–33.

16. Bordo, "Reading the Male Body," 32.

17. Bordo, "Reading the Male Body," 32.

18. Bordo, "Reading the Male Body," 63.

19. Few documents exist to verify Atlas's claims, but Angelo Siciliano appears in the ship's manifest to Ellis Island in 1903, as found by Jacqueline Reich in '"The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man': Charles Atlas, Physical Culture, and the Inscription of American Masculinity," *Men and Masculinities* 12, no. 4 (2010): 444–61.

20. Angelo Siciliano, "Building the Physique of a Greek God," *Physical Culture*, November 1921, 36–37.

21. Siciliano, "Building the Physique."

22. Siciliano, "Building the Physique."

23. Siciliano, "Building the Physique."

24. Siciliano, "Building the Physique."

25. Stewart Robertson, "Muscles by Mail," *The Family Circle* 14, no. 3 (January 20, 1936), available at http://charlesatlas.com/articletoc.html.

26. Reich, "'The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man,'" 446.

27. Reich, "'The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man,'" 458.

28. Lynne Luciano, *Looking Good: Male Body Image in Modern America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 64.

29. Reich, "'The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man,'" 446.

30. Reich, "'The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man,'" 458–59.

31. Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996).

32. Andreasson and Johansson, *The Global Gym*.

33. "Stan Sought Physical Perfection," *The Daily Mirror* (date missing), from the Stanley Rothwell Papers.

34. "Stan Sought Physical Perfection," *Daily Mirror.*

35. This is Rothwell's colloquial name for the Islington mission where clergyman Tiverton Preedy taught young men boxing and wrestling, influenced by ideals of Muscular Christianity.

36. "Stan Sought Physical Perfection," *Daily Mirror.*

37. "Stan Sought Physical Perfection," *Daily Mirror.*

38. "Stan Sought Physical Perfection," *Daily Mirror.*

39. Giulia Palladini, "Towards an Idle Theatre: The Politics and Poetics of Foreplay," *TDR: The Drama Review* 56, no. 4 (2012): 95–103, 97.

40. Palladini, "Towards an Idle Theatre," 98.

41. Palladini, "Towards an Idle Theatre," 98–99.

42. Stanley Rothwell, "*The Roads That Lead from Wigan Pier*," unpublished typescript, Stanley Rothwell Papers, 26.

43. Rothwell, "*Roads That Lead from Wigan Pier*," 8. "Hackensmids" is a reference to the wrestler and physical culturist George Hackenschmidt, who would have been a major celebrity at this point.

44. Rothwell, "*Roads That Lead from Wigan Pier*," 26.

45. Rothwell, "*Roads That Lead from Wigan Pier*," 26.

46. Rothwell, "*Roads That Lead from Wigan Pier*," 19.

47. Rothwell, "*Roads That Lead from Wigan Pier*," 17.

48. Note that the *Discobolus*, or *Discus Thrower*, also appears in Atlas's biography.

49. "Scrawny" is a relative term, since Rothwell had by this point already been engaging in the training that would lead to his feat with the ancient stone

for at least two years by this point. Rothwell, "*Roads That Lead from Wigan Pier*," 23.

50. Rothwell, "*Roads That Lead from Wigan Pier*," 28.

51. Bill Rothwell, private communication, July 31, 2017.

52. "The Art of Physical Culture" (1950), Stanley Rothwell Papers.

53. Untitled manuscript, n.d., Stanley Rothwell Papers.

54. "To the Reader" (1982), Stanley Rothwell Papers.

55. Untitled manuscript, n.d., Stanley Rothwell Papers.

56. Rothwell, "*Roads That Lead from Wigan Pier*," 75.

57. Rothwell, "*Roads That Lead from Wigan Pier*," 75.

58. Rothwell does not valorize manual work. In *Roads*, he writes: "Some people talk glibly about the dignity of labor and how noble it is, but they are usually the very people who would find it undignified to do it themselves." Rothwell, "*Roads That Lead from Wigan Pier*," 29.

59. I am thinking here of works such as Marina Abramovic's *Rhythm 0, The House with the Ocean View,* and *The Artist Is Present*; Chris Burden's *Five Day Locker Piece*; and Tehching Hsieh's *One-Year Performance 1980–1981*.

60. Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: Routledge, 2011), 90.

61. Photograph caption, 1938, Stanley Rothwell Papers.

62. Photograph caption, n.d., Stanley Rothwell Papers.

63. Photograph caption, 1934, Stanley Rothwell Papers.

64. Andrew Daniels and Aydian Dowling, "Aydian Dowling Vies to Become First Trans Person on Men's Health Cover," *Men's Health*, July 21, 2015, https://www.menshealth.com/trending-news/a19545399/aydian-dowling-mens-health-guy/.

65. Daniels and Dowling, "Aydian Dowling."

66. Rebecca Farber, "'Transing' Fitness and Remapping Transgender Male Masculinity in Online Message Boards," *Journal of Gender Studies* 26, no. 3 (2017): 254–68.

67. Farber, "'Transing' Fitness," 264.

68. Farber, "'Transing' Fitness," 259.

69. Farber, "'Transing' Fitness," 261–62.

70. Farber, "'Transing' Fitness," 262.

71. Daniels and Dowling, "Aydian Dowling."

72. Austin H. Johnson, "Transnormativity: A New Concept and Its Validation through Documentary Film about Transgender Men," *Sociological Inquiry* 86, no. 4 (2016): 465–91, 467–68, 485.

73. See Sofía Pereira-García et al., "Exploring Trans People's Narratives of Transition: Negotiation of Gendered Bodies in Physical Activity and Sport," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18 (2021): 1–14, 6.

74. Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 64–81.

75. Farber, "'Transing' Fitness," 264.

76. C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 9, 2.

77. Loren Cameron, *Body Alchemy,* quoted in Melanie Taylor, "Peter (A Young English Girl): Visualizing Transgender Masculinities," *Camera Obscura* 19, no. 2 (56) (2004): iv–45, 26.

78. Taylor, "Visualizing Transgender Masculinities," 32.

79. Cassils, quoted in E. Hella Tsaconas, "Bad Math: Calculating Bodily Capacity in Cassils's *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture*," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 26, no. 2–3 (2016): 197–207.

80. Cassils's choice of coach—Charles Glass—was hardly accidental either. Glass is a former bodybuilding champion and celebrity trainer whose home base is Gold's Gym, in Venice Beach, widely considered to be the "Mecca of Bodybuilding."

81. Tsaconas, "Bad Math," 199.

82. Tsaconas, "Bad Math," 201.

83. Kathy Acker, "Against Ordinary Language: The Language of the Body," in *The Last Sex: Feminism and Outlaw Bodies*, ed. Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993), 20–28, 21.

84. Acker, "Against Ordinary Language," 23.

85. Acker, "Against Ordinary Language," 26.

86. Acker, "Against Ordinary Language," 26.

87. Acker, "Against Ordinary Language," 23.

88. Cassils, "The Body as Social Sculpture," Artist's Lecture, Goldsmith's University, London, November 10, 2015.

89. Nicholas Chare and Ika Willis, "Introduction: Trans-: Across/Beyond," *Parallax* 22, no. 3 (2016): 267–89, 273.

90. Chare and Willis, "Introduction," 273.

91. Siufung W. L. Law, "Transgender Trouble: Gender Transcendence in Self-Ethnographic Genderqueer Experience in Hong Kong," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 22, no. 2 (2021): 196–214, 198.

92. Law, "Transgender Trouble," 206.

93. Law, "Transgender Trouble," 206.

94. Law "Transgender Trouble," 208–9.

95. Doyle, "Sex, Gender," 77.

96. Law, "Transgender Trouble," 209–10.

97. Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (London: Polity, 2013), 69.

98. Daniel Kunitz, *Lift: Fitness Culture, from Naked Greeks and Acrobats to Jazzercise and Ninja Warriors* (New York: Harper Wave, 2016), 174.

99. André Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*, trans. Anna Bostock Berger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993 [1964]). The translation of *tâtonnement* that Berger gives is "grasping"; "groping" comes from the movement theorist Carrie Noland in *Agency and Embodiment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 93–129.

100. Noland, *Agency and Embodiment*, 103.

101. Broderick Chow, "The Bouncer Who Modelled for London's Statues," *Londonist*, June 30, 2017, https://londonist.com/london/history/the-london-bouncer-who-became-a-model-for-the-city-s-statues.

Chapter 3

1. "Iron Ore," *U.S. Geological Survey, Mineral Commodities Summary*, January 2018, https://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/commodity/iron_ore/mcs-2018-feore.pdf.

2. See John D. Fair, *Muscletown USA: Bob Hoffman and the Manly Culture of York Barbell* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1999).

3. Benjamin Loehrer, "Benjamin Loehrer," *Los Campeones Minneapolis,* n.d., https://loscampeonesgym.com/benjamin-loehrer-3/.

4. The psychologist Michael Price, an academic colleague at Brunel University London, published a study which suggested that muscular men were more likely to be right-wing. Michael Price, Jennifer Sheehy-Skeffington, James Sidnaius, and Nicholas Pound, "Is Sociopolitical Egalitarianism Related to Bodily and Facial Formidability in Men?" *Evolution and Human Behavior* 38, no. 5 (2017): 626–34.

5. Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle (The Revised Oxford Translation, Volume 1)*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1240.

6. Jean-Paul Thuillier, "Roman Virilities: *Vir, Virilitas, Virtus,*" in *A History of Virility*, ed. Alain Corbin, Jean-Jacques Courtine, and Georges Vigarello, trans. Keith Cohen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 44–75.

7. Corbin, Courtine, and Vigarello, *A History of Virility,* xiii.

8. As Sandro Bellassai points out, virility was a key ideological value in Fascist Italy. Sandro Bellassai, "The Masculine Mystique: Antimodernism and Virility in Fascist Italy," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 10, no. 3 (2005): 314–35.

9. Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

10. "I Beat Two Motor-cars," *Evening Express* (Wales), January 4, 1907, 2.

11. "I Beat Two Motor-cars," 2.

12. "I Beat Two Motor-cars," 2.

13. "Wrestling," *Evening Express,* July 9, 1904, 3.

14. "Wrestling," 3.

15. "Walking Contest at Pembroke Dock," *Evening Express*, September 19, 1904, 4.

16. "Variety Entertainment," *Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, September 2, 1904, 3.

17. "Cardiff's Strong Man," *Carmarthen Weekly Reporter*, December 1, 1905, 1.

18. "Cardiff's Strong Man," 1.

19. "Cardiff's Strong Man," 1.

20. "I Beat Two Motor-cars," 2.

21. Bert Wickham, "What Is a Champion?" clipping from the Ottley Coulter scrapbooks, H. J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, University of Texas at Austin.

22. "'Strong Man' Charged," *Belfast Telegraph*, August 11, 1911, 5.

23. "'Strong Man' Charged," 5.

24. *Newcastle Journal,* May 5, 1914, 6.

25. "Feat of Welsh Hercules in Nottingham Market," *Nottingham Evening Post*, March 30, 1926, 6.

26. "Reader's Queries," *Hull Daily Mail*, February 15, 1935, 5.

27. W.A. Pullum, "Foreword: Strong Men Over the Years," in *The Amazing Samson as Told by Himself* (London: Samson Institute, 1926), 62–63, 62.

28. The incident likely explains the somewhat ironic, undated clipping in Ottley Coulter's scrapbooks that notes how both of Wickham's legs were injured when he was run down by an automobile.

29. Pullum, "Strong Men," 65.

30. Pullum, "Strong Men," 65.

31. Pullum, "Strong Men," 64.

32. "Cardiff Athlete's Challenge," *Evening Express*, October 9, 1907, 3.

33. Joshua M. Buck, "The Development of the Performances of Strongmen in American Vaudeville between 1881 and 1932" (master's thesis, University of Maryland, College Park, 1999).

34. Buck, "Performances of Strongmen," 26.

35. *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, December 14, 1910, 6.

36. Edward Aston, "How to Become a Successful Weight-Lifter," clipping, unknown date, Ottley Coulter Collection.

37. Edward Aston, untitled clipping, April 11, 1914, Ottley Coulter Collection.

38. Aston, untitled clipping, April 11, 1914, Ottley Coulter Collection.

39. Edward Aston, letter to *Health and Strength*, November 14, 1914, Ottley Coulter Collection.

40. Advertisement for Hippodrome Golders Green, May 22, 1914, Ottley Coulter Collection.

41. Advertisement for "The P.C. Event of the Season!" at Holborn Hall, December 18, 1913, Ottley Coulter Collection.

42. "*Le goût du public pour les exercices de force tient probablement aussi à l'amour qui nous avons tous pour le surnaturel; une prouesse athlètique a en effet pour notre esprit quelque chose de miraculeux*" (my translation).

43. Oliver Double, "Introduction: What Is Popular Performance?" in *Popular Performance*, ed. Adam Ainsworth, Oliver Double, and Louise Peacock (London: Bloomsbury Methuen, 2017), 1–30, 8.

44. Janette Rutterford, David R. Green, Josephine Maltby, and Alastair Owens, "Who Comprised the Nation of Shareholders? Gender and Investment in Great Britain, c. 1870–1935," *Economic History Review* 64, no. 1 (2011): 157–87; Leland H. Jenks, *The Migration of British Capital to 1875* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), 327.

45. Apostolos Fasianos, Diego Guevara, and Christos Pierros, "Have We Been Here Before? Phases of Financialization within the 20th Century in the United States," Working Paper No. 869, Levy Economics Institute, 2016.

46. Fasianos, Guevara, and Pierros, "Have We Been Here Before?" 13, 22.

47. We find a contemporary analogue in Jen Harvie's concept of the "artrepreneur," the artist who is exhorted through neoliberal social structures to self-start, take risks, and innovate. Harvie argues that this artist who must model neoliberalism "potentially damages artists, art and culture." Jen Harvie, *Fair Play: Art, Performance, and Neoliberalism* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 63.

48. Harold Ansorge, "*Proper Bent Pressing*," n.d., Ottley Coulter Collection, H. J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, University of Texas at Austin (emphasis in original).

49. Ansorge, "*Proper Bent Pressing*."

50. Kirstin Smith, "Luminous Connections: Risk, Value and Responsibility in a Late Nineteenth-Century High Wire Bicycle Stunt," *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film* 43, no. 2 (2016): 183–200.

51. Smith, "Luminous Connections," 187.

52. Smith, "Luminous Connections," 185.

53. Buck, "Performances of Strongmen," 110, 61.

54. Harold Ansorge, "*Proper Bent Pressing*."

55. George Jowett to Ottley Coulter, February 16, 1923, in the George Jowett and Ottley Coulter Letters, 1920–1968, H. J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, University of Texas at Austin.

56. *New York Clipper*, October 29, 1910, Max Morath *New York Clipper* Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library.

57. George Jowett to Ottley Coulter, January 1923.

58. Ahmed, *Willful Subjects*, 185.

59. F. C. Hannen-Swaffer, "A Man of Muscle: Being Some Episodes in the Life of Iron-Arm, the King of Weight-Lifters, Episode No. 1," *Apollo's Magazine of Strength, Skill, and Sport* 1, no. 2 (July-August 1903): 63–67.

60. Hannen-Swaffer, "A Man of Muscle," 65.

61. Ahmed, *Willful Subjects*, 175.

62. Andrew Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 12.

63. Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theatre* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 37.

64. Peter Handke, quoted in States, *Great Reckonings*.

65. *New York Clipper*, October 10, 1915.

66. *New York Clipper*, March 5, 1909.

67. States, *Great Reckonings*, 37.

68. *New York Clipper*, March 5, 1909.

69. Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).

70. Sharon Gillerman, "Samson in Vienna: The Theatrics of Jewish Masculinity," *Jewish Social Studies* 9, no. 2 (2003): 65–98, 68.

71. Gillerman, "Samson in Vienna," 74.

72. Gillerman, "Samson in Vienna," 73.

73. I am grateful to Tobi Poster-Su and postgraduate research students at Queen Mary, University of London, who helped me develop this idea during their Quorum research seminar in March 2022.

74. George Sutton Surrey, "Signor Garcia's Strong Man," *Sandow's Magazine*, July 1901, 94–102.

75. Surrey, "Signor Garcia's Strong Man," 95.

76. See Wulf D. Hund and Charles W. Mills, "Comparing Black People to Monkeys Has a Long, Dark Simian History," *The Conversation*, February 29, 2016, https://theconversation.com/comparing-black-people-to-monkeys-has-a-long-dark-simian-history-55102.

77. Derek H. Alderman, Joshua Inwood, and James A. Tyner, "Jack Johnson versus Jim Crow: Race, Reputation, and the Politics of Black Villainy: The Fight of the Century." *Southeastern Geographer* 58, no. 3 (2018): 227–49.

78. *Oxford English Dictionary*.

79. Sianne Ngai, *Theory of the Gimmick* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).

80. Nancy Fraser, "Expropriation and Exploitation in Racialized Capitalism: A Reply to Michael Dawson," *Critical Historical Studies* (Spring 2016): 163–78, 163.

81. Robin Bernstein, "Dances with Things," *Social Text* 27, no. 4 (2009): 67–94, 69.

82. Bernstein, "Dances with Things," 69.

83. Bernstein, "Dances with Things," 74.

84. Carolyn de la Peña, *The Body Electric: How Strange Machines Built the Modern American* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 13.

85. Daniel Kunitz, *Lift* (New York: Harper Wave, 2016), 278.

86. Mark Tanzer, "Equipment (Zeug)," in *The Cambridge Heidegger Lexicon*, ed. Mark A. Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 283–86.

87. Ahmed, *Willful Subjects*, 16.

88. Ahmed, *Willful Subjects*, 101.

Chapter 4

1. Janice S. Todd, Jason P. Shurley, and Terry C. Todd, "Thomas L. Delorme and His Science of Progressive Resistance Exercise," *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research* 26, no. 11 (2012): 2913–23, 2913–14.

2. Jeffrey M. Willardson claims that research on training to failure is often misleading, because in many studies the researchers did not set objective measures for whether failure was achieved. He concludes that training to failure too often can lead to overtraining injuries and a decrease in growth-promoting hormones (testosterone). A 2016 paper by Sanmy R. Nóbrega and Cleiton A. Libardi concludes that training to failure provides observable increases in muscle strength and mass when performing low-impact resistance exercise, but these benefits are comparable to high-impact resistance exercises not performed to failure, and these benefits were negligible on already strength-trained athletes. J. M. Willardson, "The Application of Training to Failure in Periodized Multiple-Set Resistance Exercise Programs," *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research* 21, no. 2 (2007): 628–31; Sanmy R. Nóbrega and Cleiton A. Lombardi, "Is Resistance Training to Muscular Failure Necessary?" *Frontiers in Physiology* 7, no. 10 (2016): 1–4.

3. Forced reps are extra repetitions of an exercise past the point of muscle failure, which are accomplished with the help of a training partner giving an extra boost to the lift. A 1RM is a "one-rep maximum," the most one can lift for a single repetition.

4. Arnd Krüger, "There Goes This Art of Manliness: Naturism and Racial Hygiene in Germany," *Journal of Sport History* 18, no. 1 (1991): 135–58.

5. Shannon L. Walsh, *Eugenics and Physical Culture Performance in the Progressive Era: Watch Whiteness Workout* (London: Palgrave, 2021), 191.

6. Arabella Stanger, *Dancing on Violent Ground: Utopia as Dispossession in Euro-American Theater Dance* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2021), 3.

7. Colin Counsell, "Dancing to Utopia: Modernity, Community and the Movement Choir," *Dance Research* 22, no. 2 (2004): 154–67, 155.

8. Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005 [1995]), 76–81.

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10. Bailes, *Poetics of Failure*, 2.

11. Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

12. Jonathan Joseph, "Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism: A Governmentality Approach," *Resilience: International Policies, Practices, and Discourses* 1, no. 1 (2013): 38–52, 39–40; Maguire, *Fit for Consumption*.

13. "Map," *CrossFit*, https://map.crossfit.com/.

14. J. C. Herz, *Learning to Breathe Fire: The Rise of CrossFit and the Primal Future of Fitness* (New York: Three Rivers, 2014), 31.

15. Herz, *Learning to Breathe Fire*, 31.

16. Leslie Heywood, "'Strange Borrowing': Affective Neuroscience, Neoliberalism and the 'Cruelly Optimistic' Gendered Bodies of CrossFit," in *Twenty-First Century Feminism: Forming and Performing Femininity*, ed. Claire Nally and Angela Smith (London: Palgrave, 2015), 31–32.

17. Marcelle C. Dawson, "CrossFit: Fitness Cult or Reinventive Institution?" *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 52, no. 3 (2017): 361–79; Matthew Crockett, "Chasing Rx: A Spatial Ethnography of the CrossFit Gym" (master's thesis, San Jose State University, 2015), 53.

18. CrossFit's programming has been criticized by strength and conditioning coaches and fitness professionals for being prone to overtraining. While acknowledging these dangers, CrossFit also celebrates them, as in the cartoon mascots "Pukie the Clown" and "Uncle Rhabdo." The first mascot, of a vomiting CrossFitter, is self-explanatory. "Rhabdo" refers to rhabdomyolysis, a serious condition where dead muscle fibers are released into the bloodstream, potentially causing renal failure. Chet Morjaria, "Why Pukie the Clown Isn't Funny," *Breaking Muscle*, n.d., https://breakingmuscle.com/fitness/why-pukie-the-clown-isn-t-funny.

19. A kettlebell swing is an exercise where the participant swings a kettlebell either parallel to the ground or above the head with both hands; in a thruster the athlete squats with a bar balanced on her shoulders, and as she comes back out of the squat, presses the bar above her head; a wall ball is a move where the participant squats down, pushes back up, and throws a heavy medicine ball at an agreed target on the wall; double-unders are a move with the skipping-rope where the rope crosses under the athlete's feet twice as he jumps.

20. See Sara Ahmed, *Complaint!* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021).

21. Gene Demby, "Who's Really Left Out of the CrossFit Circle," NPR, September 15, 2013, https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/09/15/222574436/whos-really-left-out-of-the-crossfit-circle?t=1530099537387.

22. Demby, "Who's Really Left Out."
23. Fred Pfeil, *White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference* (London: Verso, 1995), 29.
24. E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 186.
25. Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 186.
26. Kélina Gotman, *Choreomania: Dance and Disorder* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 2.
27. Austin Flint, *A Treatise on the Principles and Practice of Medicine* (Philadelphia: H.C. Lea, 1868), via *Oxford English Dictionary*.
28. George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 85.
29. Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 187.
30. Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 187.
31. Ben Barker-Benfield, "The Spermatic Economy: The Nineteenth Century View of Sexuality," *Feminist Studies* 1, no. 1 (1972): 45–74. The quotation from George M. Beard is cited in Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 134–35.
32. "NoFap," *Reddit.com*, https://www.reddit.com/r/NoFap/comments/2bb7sa/nofap_is_about_regaining_your_manhood_and_thats/.
33. Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 135.
34. Nicholas Turse, "Prometheus Unbound: The Technology of Bodybuilding in the Nervous Age," *Past Imperfect* 8 (1999): 33–61, 51–52.
35. Turse, "Prometheus Unbound," 53–54.
36. Richard W. Dowell, "Introduction," in *An Amateur Laborer*, by Theodore Dreiser (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), xi–xii.
37. Dreiser, *An Amateur Laborer*, 4.
38. Dreiser, *An Amateur Laborer*, 27.
39. Dreiser, *An Amateur Laborer*, 66.
40. Dreiser, *An Amateur Laborer*, 67–68.
41. Dreiser, *An Amateur Laborer*, 79.
42. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: A Study of Economic Institutions* (London: Dover, 1994 [1899]).
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44. Dreiser, *An Amateur Laborer*, 73–74.
45. Dreiser, *An Amateur Laborer*, 73.
46. Gotman argues in *Choreomania* that the medicalization of choreic movement (tics, spasms) is part of modernity's disciplining of disorder, spontaneity, and unpermitted assembly.
47. Dreiser, *An Amateur Laborer*, 78.
48. Dreiser, *An Amateur Laborer*, 88.
49. Dreiser, *An Amateur Laborer*, 88.
50. Dreiser, *An Amateur Laborer*, 111.
51. Dreiser, *An Amateur Laborer*, 111.
52. Jennifer Travis, "Injury's Accountant: Theodore Dreiser and the Railroad," *Studies in American Naturalism* 3, no. 1 (2008): 42–60, 43.
53. Travis, "Injury's Accountant," 45.

54. De la Peña, *The Body Electric*, 14.

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56. Todd et al., "Thomas L. Delorme," 2914.

57. Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics,* trans. Mark Polizzotti (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press/Semiotext(e), 2006).

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60. Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 88.

61. Brad Campbell, "The Making of 'American': Race and Nation in Neurasthenic Discourse," *History of Psychiatry* 18, no. 2 (2007): 161.

62. Campbell, "The Making of 'American,' " 161.

63. Campbell, "The Making of 'American,' " 162.

64. Campbell, "The Making of 'American,' " 169–75.

65. Warwick Anderson, "The Trespass Speaks: White Masculinity and Colonial Breakdown," *American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (1997): 1343–70, 1345.

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67. Kyla Wazana Tompkins, "'You Make Me Feel Right Quare': Promiscuous Reading, Minoritarian Critique, and White Sovereign Entrepreneurial Terror," *Social Text* 35, no. 4 (2017): 53–86, 56.

68. Tompkins, "'You Make Me Feel Right Quare,' " 67.

69. Karen Lee Ashcraft and Lisa A. Flores, "'Slaves in White Collars': Persistent Performances of Masculinity in Crisis," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (2003): 1–29.

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71. Jasbir Puar, "Coda: The Cost of Getting Better: Suicide, Sensation, Switchpoints," *GLQ* 18, no. 1 (2011): 149–58, 153.

72. "What Is CrossFit?" CrossFit.com, https://www.crossfit.com/what-is-crossfit.

73. Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (1992): 3–7, 3.

74. Deleuze, "Postscript," 4.

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77. Deleuze, "Postscript," 4–5.
78. Deleuze, "Postscript," 4.
79. Dorinne Kondo, *Worldmaking: Race, Performance and the Work of Creativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).
80. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 27.
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82. Geoffrey L. Greif, *Buddy System: Understanding Male Friendships* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
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85. Gilles Deleuze, "*La Voix de Gilles Deleuze en Ligne*," http://www2.univ-paris8.fr/deleuze/article.php3?id_article=36.
86. Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 1.
87. See Jesse McMeekin, "What CrossFit Can Teach Us about Building Communities and Relationships," *The Personal Trainer Development Center*, June 2016, https://www.theptdc.com/2016/06/building-community-relationships-with-clients-from-crossfit-principles/.
88. Luciana Parisi and Tiziana Terranova, "Heat-Death: Emergence and Control in Genetic Engineering and Artificial Life," CTheory.net, May 10, 2000, www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=127, 1.
89. Parisi and Terranova, "Heat-Death," 1.

Chapter 5

1. George Hackenschmidt, "*The Russian Lion,*" unpublished manuscript, n.d., H. J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, University of Texas at Austin, 108.
2. Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 83.
3. Abramovic's *The Artist Is Present* is an interesting analogue to Hackenschmidt's description. In the performance, Abramovic sat at a large table in the atrium of New York's Museum of Modern Art, as an "endless succession" of visitors queued to sit across from her, one after the other. The performance took place every day from March 14 to May 31, 2010, and Abramovic faced 1,545 visitors and sat for a total of 736.5 hours.
4. See Broderick D. V. Chow, "Work and Shoot: Professional Wrestling and Embodied Politics," *TDR: The Drama Review* 222, no. 2 (58) (2014): 72–86; Broderick Chow, "Muscle Memory: Re-enacting the *Fin-de-Siècle* Strongman in Pro Wrestling," in *Performance and Professional Wrestling*, ed. Broderick Chow, Eero Laine, and Claire Warden (London: Routledge, 2017), 143–53, 150; and Broderick Chow, "A Professional Body: Remembering, Repeating

and Working Out Masculinities in Fin-de-Siècle Physical Culture," *Performance Research* 20, no. 5 (2015): 30–41.

5. Paul Austin, "The History of British Wrestling: Part One," *Bleacher Report*, June 10, 2010, http://bleacherreport.com/articles/404251-the-history-of-british-wrestling-part-one. On the early reality of professional wrestling, see Scott Beekman, *Ringside: A History of Professional Wrestling in America* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006); and Eero Laine, "Stadium-Sized Theatre: WWE and the World of Professional Wrestling," in Chow, Laine, and Warden, *Performance and Professional Wrestling*, 39–47. David Shoemaker suggests that matches have been fixed and fans have been in on the game for over a hundred years: *The Squared Circle: Life, Death, and Professional Wrestling* (New York: Gotham Books, 2013), esp. 23.

6. According to Diogenes Laërtius, Plato was given the name by his wrestling coach on account of his muscular shoulders (*Platon* = "broad"). See https://www.ancient.eu/plato/. The irony, of course, is that Plato used the dialogue, a highly theatrical form, as the basis of his philosophy.

7. The literary critic Edward Said, in his final work, analyzed "lateness" in literary and musical works not as a serene acceptance of death, but as a kind of uncompromising, unresolved, or contradictory style. Lateness for Said often marks a sharp turn away from an earlier artistic trajectory. Edward W. Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (London: Vintage, 2007).

8. Jan Todd, "A Forgotten Sport Philosopher: George Hackenschmidt, the Russian Lion" (paper presented at the International Association for Philosophy of Sport, Rochester, NY, September 2011).

9. George Hackenschmidt, "Post-WWI Autobiographical Fragment" (n.p.), George Hackenschmidt Collection, H. J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, University of Texas at Austin.

10. Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, *Victorian Afterlives: The Shaping of Influence in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 92.

11. Douglas-Fairhurst, *Victorian Afterlives,* 92.

12. Douglas-Fairhurst, *Victorian Afterlives*, 92.

13. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 2009 [1997]).

14. George Hackenschmidt, *The Way to Live in Health and Physical Fitness* (London: Athletic Publications, 1908), 94.

15. Hackenschmidt, *The Way to Live*, 94.

16. Hackenschmidt, *The Way to Live*, 94.

17. Hackenschmidt, "*The Russian Lion*," 22.

18. Hackenschmidt, *The Way to Live*, 99.

19. Hackenschmidt, "*The Russian Lion*," 23.

20. See Chow, "A Professional Body," for a fuller description of his stage exhibitions.

21. Ryan Meisner, "The 5 Best Wrestling Feuds from Before You Were Born," *Bleacher Report*, January 11, 2013, http://bleacherreport.com/articles/1480500. The feud of Hackenschmidt and Gotch is number one on Meisner's

list. (Meisner presents the feud as one in which Gotch is the innocent "face" whose reputation was impugned by Hackenschmidt, the sore loser.)

22. Hackenschmidt, "*The Russian Lion*," 8.

23. Hackenschmidt, "*The Russian Lion*," 9. One imagines that Hackenschmidt is not saying he went to the circus in "blackface," but rather dirtied his face to look older (this also hints at the populist or lower-class origins of circus and wrestling).

24. Hackenschmidt, "*The Russian Lion*," 9.

25. Chow, "A Professional Body," 35.

26. Quoted in Hackenschmidt, "*The Russian Lion*," 127.

27. Quoted in Hackenschmidt, "*The Russian Lion,*" 129.

28. Enders, *Murder by Accident*, 12.

29. Susan Bennett calls this the "outer frame" of performance. Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (London: Routledge, 1997), 139.

30. Graeme Kent, *Boxing's Strangest Fights* (London: Robson Books, 2000), 59.

31. Kent, *Boxing's Strangest Fights*, 61.

32. Kent, *Boxing's Strangest Fights,* 61; Chapman and Brown, *Universal Hunks*, 153.

33. C.B. Cochran, quoted in Hackenschmidt, "*The Russian Lion*," 134.

34. Hackenschmidt, "*The Russian Lion*," 134.

35. Graeme Kent, *A Pictorial History of Wrestling (London: Spring Books, 1969)*, 153.

36. Broderick Chow, Eero Laine, and Claire Warden, "Hamlet Doesn't Blade: Professional Wrestling, Theatre, and Performance," in Chow, Laine, and Warden, *Performance and Professional Wrestling,* 1–6.

37. Quoted in Hackenschmidt, "*The Russian Lion*," 138.

38. Quoted in Hackenschmidt, "*The Russian Lion*," 138.

39. Hackenschmidt, "*The Russian Lion*," 131.

40. Hackenschmidt, "*The Russian Lion*," 43.

41. Hackenschmidt, "*The Russian Lion*," 47.

42. Hackenschmidt, "*The Russian Lion*," 71.

43. Hackenschmidt, "*The Russian Lion*," 125.

44. Hackenschmidt, "*The Russian Lion*," 72, 123.

45. Hackenschmidt, "*The Russian Lion*," 123.

46. While the publication or interviewer is not given, this text derives from another unpublished autobiographical manuscript. Perhaps comprising a proposed second volume of the book, the fragment encompasses Hackenschmidt's years after World War I. George Hackenschmidt, "Post-WWI Autobiographical Fragment," George Hackenschmidt Collection, H. J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, University of Texas at Austin.

47. Hackenschmidt, "The Russian Lion," 118.

48. Hackenschmidt, "The Russian Lion," 219 (emphasis in original).

49. George Hackenschmidt, "Sentiment," n.d., George Hackenschmidt Collection, H. J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, University of Texas at Austin.

50. Hackenschmidt, "Sentiment" (n.p.).

51. Hackenschmidt, "Sentiment" (n.p.; emphasis added).

52. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 2, scene 2.

53. Patricia S. Gourlay, "Guilty Creatures Sitting at a Play: Notes on Hamlet, Act II, Scene 2," *Renaissance Quarterly,* 24, no. 2 (1971): 221–25, 224.

54. George Hackenschmidt, "Obedient to the Letter, or Command Attitudes towards One's Neighbour in the World of Untruth," unpublished manuscript, n.d., George Hackenschmidt Collection, H. J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, University of Texas at Austin.

55. Hackenschmidt, "Obedient to the Letter" (n.p.).

56. Hackenschmidt, "Obedient to the Letter."

57. Hackenschmidt, "Obedient to the Letter." The claim about Chinese attitudes to acting has some basis in fact. Wu Cuncun, for instance, points to a concept that literally signifies the "conflation of actor and prostitute": *chang you bingti.* Wu Cuncun, "The 2015 Lecture on Theatre, Nightlife, and Literary Adventure in Nineteenth-Century Beijing," University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, January 23, 2015, http://hub.hku.hk/handle/10722/215728.

58. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 1969 [1943]), 59.

59. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 48.

60. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 49.

61. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 60.

62. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 60. Tony Fisher's article "Bad Faith and the Actor" provides a fascinating exploration of the question of whether theatrical acting constitutes, in Sartrean terms, an act of bad faith. He concludes that the situation of "theatrical mimesis" stages a "quasi-reality," and as such, the actor, while he is "master of the technique of bad faith . . . is so not for the purpose of self-deception but for the purposes of demonstrating what is possible by acting it." Tony Fisher, "Bad Faith and the Actor: Onto-Mimetology from a Sartrean Point of View," *Sartre Studies International* 15, no. 1 (2009): 74–91, 89.

63. Hackenschmidt, "Post-WWI Autobiographical Fragment."

64. George Hackenschmidt, *It Is from Within* (London: Hackenschmidt's Institute [self-published], 1934), 5. According to Jan Todd, *It Is from Within* was composed by Hackenschmidt and his ghost writer, Harold Kelly, and was self-published. However, upon rereading the finished text, Hackenschmidt decided it was not good enough and had the copies pulped. The Stark Center holds two existing copies of the book, one with Hack's extensive corrections and handwritten marginal notes.

65. Hackenschmidt, *It Is from Within*, 5.

66. Joseph Roach, *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985), 179.

67. Hackenschmidt, *It Is from Within*, 6.

68. The quotations here come from a letter by Harold Kelly to George Bernard Shaw summarizing Hackenschmidt's system, July 9, 1943, George Hackenschmidt Collection, H. J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, University of Texas at Austin.

69. Hackenschmidt, *It Is from Within*, 19.

70. Hackenschmidt, *It Is from Within*, 19.

71. Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Zone Books/MIT Press, 1990 [1896]).
72. Hackenschmidt, *It Is from Within*, 26.
73. Terry Todd and Spencer Maxcy, "Muscle, Memory: And George Hackenschmidt," *Iron Game History* 2, no. 3 (1992): 10–13, 13.
74. George Hackenschmidt, *Attitudes and Their Relations to Human Manifestations* (London: Thorsen Publications, 1937), 117.
75. George Hackenschmidt, *Fitness and Your Self* (London: Athletic Publications, 1939), 9.
76. Todd and Maxcy, "Muscle, Memory," 15.
77. Douglas-Fairhurst, *Victorian Afterlives*, 85–92.
78. Hackenschmidt, *Attitudes*, 11.
79. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word "attitude" was first used as a technical term in the fine arts, referring to how a figure was disposed in a statue or painting.
80. Hackenschmidt, *Attitudes*, 11.
81. Hackenschmidt, *Attitudes*, 15.
82. Hackenschmidt, "Post-WWI Autobiographical Fragment."
83. "attitude, n.," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, June 2018, Oxford University Press, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/12876?redirectedFrom=attitude.
84. Charles William Smith, *The Actor's Art* (London: Thomas Hailes Lacey, 1867), 11.
85. Edmund Shaftesbury, *Lessons in the Art of Acting* (London: Martyn College Press, 1889); Edward B. Warman, *Gesture and Attitudes: An Exposition of the Delsarte Philosophy of Expression Practical and Theoretical* (Boston: Lee and Shepherd, 1892).
86. Copeau, quoted in Sears A. Eldredge and Hollis W. Huston, "Actor Training in the Neutral Mask," in *Acting (Re)Considered*, ed. Philip B. Zarilli (London: Routledge, 2005), 140–47, 140.
87. Copeau, quoted in "Actor Training in the Neutral Mask," 141.
88. Mark Evans, *Movement Training for the Modern Actor* (London: Routledge, 2009).
89. Anne Bogart, *And Then, You Act: Making Art in an Unpredictable World* (London: Routledge, 2007), 93–105.
90. Evans, *Movement Training*, 97.
91. Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, trans. Jean Benedetti (London: Routledge, 2008), 194.
92. Despite *An Actor's Work* being a comprehensive guide to Stanislavsky's system, the entire text is written as a fictional student's diary.
93. Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 195.
94. Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 197.
95. Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 197.
96. Jerzy Grotowski, "Statement of Principles," in Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2002 [1968]), 255–62, 257.
97. Evans, *Movement Training*, 145.
98. Hackenschmidt, *Attitudes*, 116.

99. Mary Nugent, title unknown, quoted at length in Hackenschmidt, "*The Russian Lion*," 141.

100. David Gerstner, *Manly Arts: Masculinity and Nation in Early American Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 1–50, 13.

101. *The World*, author unknown, n.d., quoted in Hackenschmidt, "*The Russian Lion*," 194–95.

102. George Hackenschmidt, "Eugen Sandow," unpublished manuscript, n.d., George Hackenschmidt Collection, H. J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, University of Texas at Austin (emphasis added).

103. Hackenschmidt, "Eugen Sandow."

104. Chapman, *Sandow the Magnificent*, 74.

105. Stephen J. Bottoms, "The Efficacy/Effeminacy Braid: Unpacking the Performance Studies/Theatre Studies Dichotomy," *Theatre Topics* 13, no. 2 (2003): 173–87, 185.

106. Richard Schechner, quoted in Bottoms, "Efficacy/Effeminacy," 176–77.

107. Bottoms, "Efficacy/Effeminacy," 177.

108. Kaplan, quoted in Bottoms, "Efficacy/Effeminacy," 178.

109. Bottoms, "Efficacy/Effeminacy," 177.

110. Chow, "Muscle Memory," 150.

111. Hackenschmidt, "*The Russian Lion*," 24.

112. See Michael Schwalbe, *Unlocking the Iron Cage: Men's Movement, Gender Politics and American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); and David Savran, *Taking It Like A Man: White Masculinity, Masochism and Contemporary American Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

113. Henry Jenkins III, "'Never Trust a Snake': WWF Wrestling as Masculine Melodrama," in *Steel Chair to the Head*, ed. Nicholas Sammond (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 55.

114. Hackenschmidt, "Post-WWI Autobiographical Fragment."

Chapter 6

1. E. Alex Jung, "How Zac Efron Got So Hauntingly Swole for *Baywatch*," *Vulture*, August 24, 2017, http://www.vulture.com/2017/08/how-zac-efron-got-those-muscles-for-baywatch.html.

2. Jung, "How Zac Efron Got."

3. Jung, "How Zac Efron Got."

4. Yes, this is a real story. Allie Jones, "Zac Efron Could Destroy Everything in His Path," *The Cut*, May 19, 2016, https://www.thecut.com/2016/05/zac-efron-could-destroy-everything-in-his-path.html.

5. Kendall Fisher, "Kelly Rohrbach Reveals the Crazy Things Zac Efron Did to Stay Ripped on the Baywatch Set," *E! Online*, April 24, 2017, https://www.eonline.com/uk/news/845688/kelly-rohrbach-reveals-the-crazy-things-zac-efron-did-to-stay-ripped-on-the-baywatch-set.

6. Kyla Schuller, *The Biopolitics of Feeling: Race, Sex, and Science in the Nineteenth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

7. Schuller, *Biopolitics of Feeling*, 12–13.

8. Schuller, *Biopolitics of Feeling*, 13.

9. See, for example, "How To Get A Body like Bruce Lee: Body Breakdown," *Jump Rope Dudes*, n.d., https://jumpropedudes.com/how-to-get-a-body-like-bruce-lee-body-breakdown/.

10. Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns, *Puro Arte: Filipinos on the Stages of Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 119.

11. In keeping with this book's transatlantic scope, I used the term "Asians in the West" to encompass both Asian Americans and British East and Southeast Asians.

12. Nguyen Tan Hoang, *A View from the Bottom: Asian American Masculinity and Sexual Representation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 4.

13. Angela Liu, "MRAsians: A Convergence between Asian American Hypermasculine Ethnonationalism and the Manosphere," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 24, no. 1 (2021): 93–112.

14. "Funny Asian guy in a gym," *YouTube*, October 20, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEgfucaIUTg.

15. "Asian guy gym fail epic gains technique," *YouTube*, April 23, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SF4NRzVgHEU; "Stupid Asian at the gym," *YouTube*, September 25, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GMXH9PSXcA.

16. "F**k all the asians in my gym," *Bodybuilding.com Forums,* January 30, 2012, https://forum.bodybuilding.com/showthread.php?t=141845441&page=1.

17. Yen Ling Shek, "Asian American Masculinity: A Review of the Literature," *Journal of Men's Studies* 14, no. 3 (2006): 379–91, 383.

18. Michael Park, "Asian American Masculinity Eclipsed: A Legal and Historical Perspective of Emasculation through U.S. Immigration Practices," *Modern American*, no. 1 (Fall 2013): 5–17; Joshua Takano Chambers-Letson, *A Race So Different: Performance and Law in Asian America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Karen Shimakawa, *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

19. Park, "Asian American Masculinity Eclipsed," 6.

20. Park, "Asian American Masculinity Eclipsed," 8.

21. Park, "Asian American Masculinity Eclipsed," 9.

22. Park, "Asian American Masculinity Eclipsed," 5.

23. Michael K. Park, "Psy-zing Up the Mainstreaming of 'Gangnam Style': Embracing Asian Masculinity as Neo-Minstrelsy?" *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 39, no. 3 (2015): 195–212, 199.

24. David L. Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 113.

25. Eng, *Racial Castration*, 114. This reading of the mirror stage is drawn from Lacan's *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis.*

26. Eng, *Racial Castration*, 115.

27. I am consciously drawing on these fundamental thinkers in Black studies not in order to render the experience of Asians and Blacks in the United States and United Kingdom as equivalent, but to challenge the creeping white supremacist paradigm, founded on the myth of the model minority, that Asians

are un-raced or "white-adjacent." See Jezzika Chung, "How Asian Immigrants Learn Anti-Blackness from White Culture, and How to Stop It," *Huffington Post*, September 7, 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/how-asian-americans-can-stop-contributing-to-anti-blackness_us_599f0757e4b0cb7715bfd3d4?guccounter=1.

28. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover, 2016 [1903]), 2.

29. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 4.

30. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 2.

31. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove, 2008 [1952]), 90. The reference to Merleau-Ponty is implied, and has been elaborated by Jeremy Weate in "Fanon, Merleau-Ponty and the Difference of Phenomenology," in *Race*, ed. Robert Bernasconi (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 171.

32. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 91.

33. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 91.

34. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 92.

35. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 92. "*Y a bon Banania,*" or "It's good, Banania" refers to a French chocolate drink whose branding features a stereotypical caricature of a grinning Senegalese man.

36. Liu, "MRAsians," 105.

37. Celine Parreñas Shimizu, *Straightjacket Sexualities: Unbinding Asian American Manhoods in the Movies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002); Eng-Beng Lim, *Brown Boys and Rice Queens: Spellbinding Performance in the Asias* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); Richard Fung, "Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn," in *How Do I Look: Queer Film and Video*, ed. Bad Object-Choiced (Seattle, WA: Bay, 1991), 145–68; Crystal Parikh, "'The Most Outrageous Masquerade': Queering Asian-American Masculinity," *Modern Fiction Studies* 48, no. 4 (2002): 858–98.

38. Schuller, *Biopolitics of Feeling*.

39. Schuller, *Biopolitics of Feeling*, 207.

40. Schuller, *Biopolitics of Feeling*, 207.

41. Schuller, *Biopolitics of Feeling*, 35–67.

42. Schuller, *Biopolitics of Feeling*, 53.

43. Schuller, *Biopolitics of Feeling*, 55.

44. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Marxists.org, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hi/lectures1.htm (emphasis added).

45. Robert Kurfirst, "John Stuart Mill's Asian Parable," in *Yellow Peril! An Archive of Anti-Asian Fear*, ed. John Kuo Wei Tchen and Dylan Yeats (London: Verso, 2014), 153–56, 154.

46. Jack London, "The Yellow Peril," in Tchen and Yeats, *Yellow Peril!* 176–77, 177.

47. Robert G. Lee, *Orientals: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 53.

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Coda

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2. Patricia Stuelke, *The Ruse of Repair: US Neoliberal Empire and the Turn from Critique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021).

3. David L. Eng, "Colonial Object Relations," *Social Text* 34, no. 1 (2016): 1–20, 14, 16.

4. Freeman, *Time Binds*.

5. Giulia Palladini, "Logic of Prelude: On Use Value, Pleasure, and the Struggle against Agony," *Contemporary Theatre Review: Interventions* 29, no. 4, "Political Times" (January 15, 2020). https://www.contemporarytheatrereview.org/2020/logic-of-prelude-on-use-value-pleasure-and-the-struggle-against-agony/.

6. Tolga Ozyurtcu, "Flex Marks the Spot: Histories of Muscle Beach" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2014); Jan Todd, "The Halcyon Days of Muscle Beach," in *LA Sports*, ed. Wayne Wilson and David K. Wiggins (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2018), 239–54, 242.

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8. Pudgy Stockton, however, recalls that the permanent raised platform was only developed in the early 1940s. Abbye "Pudgy" Stockton, interviewed by Jan Todd, Santa Monica, CA, May 16, 1998.

9. Todd, "Halcyon Days," 247.

10. Harold Zinkin (with Bonnie Hearn), *Remembering Muscle Beach: Where Hard Bodies Began* (Santa Monica, CA: Angel City, 1999), 10 (emphasis added).

11. Todd, "Halcyon Days," 251. Pudgy Stockton's photo binders of the "War Years" include a number of clippings that build on her image in "Home Front" propaganda. For example, the *Los Angeles Times*, on August 9, 1942, printed a picture of Pudgy at home sewing: "In her home Mrs. Stockton puts aside her barbells and sews a fine seam. She can cook, too." Abbye (Pudgy) Eville Stockton and Les Stockton Papers (Publicity Binder #3), H. J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, University of Texas at Austin.

12. Bob Myers, "Musclemen Undisturbed over Financial Careers," *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 1948, in the Abbye (Pudgy) Eville Stockton and Les Stockton Papers (Publicity Binder #4).

13. George Eiferman, interviewed by Jan Todd, Las Vegas, 1999.

14. Abbye Stockton, interview.

15. Steve Reeves, interviewed by Terry Todd, "The Last Interview," *Iron Game History* 6, no. 4 (2000): 1–14, 4.

16. Reeves, "The Last Interview," 4.

17. *Evening Outlook*, June 12, 1959, quoted in Ozyurtcu, "Flex Marks the Spot," 62.
18. Ozyurtcu, "Flex Marks the Spot," 53.
19. Ozyurtcu, "Flex Marks the Sport," 10–11, 32.
20. Todd, "Halcyon Days," 254.
21. The German economist and philosopher Georg Franck conceived of the economy of attention (1998) as a secondary economy, relating to, as Palladini defines/translates: "the ability, by various means, of catching other people's attention and hence acquiring social credit or recognition." Palladini, *The Scene of Foreplay*, 168.
22. See Pudgy Stockton's publicity binders; 1940 alone features clippings from articles in *Everyday Photography*, *Pic*, *Click: The National Picture Monthly*, and *Popular Photography.* Abbye (Pudgy) Eville Stockton and Les Stockton Papers (Publicity Binder #2).
23. Zinkin (with Hearn), *Remembering Muscle Beach*, 33 (emphasis added).
24. Joseph Strick and Irving Lerner, *Muscle Beach* (1948; Santa Monica, CA: Strick Film Company, 1951), via *YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UneohSkvNFg.
25. British Pathé, "Now for Alexis and Dorrano the celebrated Adagio Dancers, in their famous 'Danse Apache' " (1934), *YouTube*, April 13, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-g48wL8stY.
26. Paula Boelsems, quoted in Ozyurtcu, "Flex Marks the Spot," 32.
27. Harold Zinkin, interviewed by Jan Todd, quoted in Ozyurtcu, "*Flex Marks the Spot*," 32.
28. Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*: *For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), 52.
29. Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 90.
30. Zinkin, quoted in Ozyurtcu, "*Flex Marks the Spot*," 32.
31. Zinkin (with Hearn), *Remembering Muscle Beach*, 14.
32. Abbye Stockton, interview.
33. Abye Stockton, interview.
34. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 28.
35. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 78.
36. Clifton's 1958 pulp novel features a bodybuilding teenager, Jerry, who gets caught up with a predatory homosexual photographer called Ray Petersen (a thinly veiled Bob Mizer). Clifton hints at Muscle Beach's queer subculture, writing: "Of course Muscle Beach is just a strip of white sand in Santa Monica, but it's also a country of its own, and while the folklore may not be printable, there's a lot of it." Clifton's novel contains no actual sex; the "perversion" is the narcissistic idea of body worship itself. Bud Clifton, *Muscle Boy* (New York City: Ace Books, 1958; Kindle edition: PlanetMonk Books, 2015), loc. 1080.
37. Palladini, *The Scene of Foreplay*, 4.
38. Palladini, *The Scene of Foreplay*, 38, 68.
39. Palladini, *The Scene of Foreplay*, 38.
40. Palladini, *The Scene of Foreplay*, 39.

41. Palladini, *The Scene of Foreplay*, 39.
42. Palladini, *The Scene of Foreplay*, 38.
43. Palladini, *The Scene of Foreplay*, 74. Palladini is speaking here of the performances of Jack Smith from the late 1960s and early 1970s.
44. Nicholas Ridout, *Passionate Amateurs: Theatre, Communism, and Love* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 15.
45. Ridout, *Passionate Amateurs*, 29.
46. Ridout, *Passionate Amateurs*, 29.
47. Ridout, *Passionate Amateurs*, 29.
48. Palladini, "Logic of Prelude," n.p.
49. Palladini, "Logic of Prelude," n.p.
50. Arabella Stanger, *Dancing on Violent Ground* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2021).
51. Palladini, "Logic of Prelude," n.p.
52. Postcard from Johnny Terpak to Les and Pudgy Stockton, Abbye (Pudgy) Eville Stockton and Les Stockton Papers.
53. See, for instance, Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).
54. The twelve-year gap between the Stocktons' marriage and the birth of their child also seems to index a kind of deferral and embrace of alternative modes of living.
55. Jan Todd, "The Legacy of Pudgy Stockton," *Iron Game History* 2, no. 1 (1992): pp. 5–7, 6.
56. Todd, "Legacy of Pudgy Stockton," 6.
57. This text is a selection of captions drawn from Pudgy Stockton's photo binders in the Abbye (Pudgy) Eville Stockton and Les Stockton Papers.
58. Abbye (Pudgy) Eville Stockton and Les Stockton Papers (Photo Binder #3).
59. Terry became the first man to squat over 700 lbs. in competition in 1965, and Jan was called the "strongest woman in the world" by *Sports Illustrated* during her powerlifting career.
60. Mark Henry, like Bruno Sammertino, is a powerlifter and former World Wrestling Entertainment wrestler, from Austin, Texas. Terry met him as a teenager, and Henry considers Terry a "surrogate father."
61. "Obituary for Terence 'Terry' Todd, PhD.," *Weed-Corley-Fish Funeral Homes and Cremation Services*, http://wcfish.tributes.com/obituary/show/Terence-Terry-Todd-106242904.
62. See my chapter on exercise and the Covid-19 pandemic: "Swolecial Distancing: Gym Closures and the Quarantine Workout," in *Time Out: Global Perspectives on Sport and the Covid-19 Lockdown*, ed. Jörg Krieger, April Henning, Lindsay Parks Pieper, and Paul Dimeo (Champaign, IL: Common Ground Research Networks), 119–31.
63. Alyx Gorman and Josh Taylor, "CrossFit CEO Greg Glassman Resigns after Offensive George Floyd and Coronavirus Tweets," *The Guardian*, June 10, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/10/greg-glassman-crossfit-ceo-resigns-george-floyd-protest-coronavirus-tweets-conspiracy-theories.

64. I am endlessly grateful to the second anonymous reviewer, whose incisive comments on the limited potentials of revised masculinities have shaped nearly every aspect of this book. In particular, their suggestion that the task is to "undo Man" led me to Sylvia Wynter, whose work on the coloniality of being has been transformative.

65. Ridout, *Passionate Amateurs*, 16.

66. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*; Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise*, 80.

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