

***From 'Classical' To 'Freaky:' an Exploration of the
Development of Dominant, Organised, Male
Bodybuilding Culture***

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Submitted for the Degree of PhD in Sociology

February 2012

Declaration:

The work presented in this thesis is my own.

Dimitrios Liokaftos

Signed,

Abstract

Through a combination of historical and empirical research, the present thesis explores the development of dominant, organized bodybuilding culture across three periods: early (1880s-1930s), middle (1940s-1970s), and late (1980s-present). This periodization reflects the different paradigms in bodybuilding that the research identifies and examines at the level of body aesthetic, model of embodied practice, aesthetic of representation, formal spectacle, and prevalent meanings regarding the 'nature' of bodybuilding. Employing organized bodybuilding displays as the axis for the discussion, the project traces the gradual shift from an early bodybuilding model, represented in the ideal of the 'classical,' 'perfect' body, to a late-modern model celebrating the 'freaky,' 'monstrous' body. This development is shown to have entailed changes in notions of the 'good' body, moving from a 'restorative' model of 'all-around' development, health, and moderation whose horizon was a return to an unsurpassable standard of 'normality,' to a technologically-enhanced, performance-driven one where 'perfection' assumes the form of an open-ended project towards the 'impossible.' Central in this process is a shift in male identities, as the appearance of the body turns not only into a legitimate priority for bodybuilding practitioners but also into an instance of sport performance in bodybuilding competition. Equally central, and related to the above, is a shift from a model of amateur competition and non-instrumental practice to one of professional competition and extreme measures in search of the winning edge. Explored in its different facets, the currently dominant paradigm, whose origins are traced back to a late-1960s USA context, is shown to have prevailed through aligning itself with a larger ideology of self-actualization and performance as well as a corporate modus operandi. Despite exhibiting increasingly insular tendencies at a national level in the last 20 years, it is shown to reproduce itself and even expand through its global reach.

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Acknowledgments

I am thankful to my supervisor Vic Seidler for his faith, insights, 'old school' model of practicing thinking and writing, and for being right there with me in the final rounds. To my extended family and friends for their ongoing support, and most notably to Val for making me laugh at myself. To the various other PhD fellows who appear, disappear, and reappear. To the members of Goldsmiths Sociology whose academic work, presence, and integrity are inspiring. To the members of support staff who have always been extremely generous with me.

Sincere thanks for their generosity go to all who participated in this research, especially to David Chapman and the directors of the H.J. Lucher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports (University of Texas at Austin) for granting me access to a wealth of archival material.

This project is dedicated to my parents who've waited for so long.

Preface

I have always found bodybuilding interesting. I got introduced to it as a boy, watching Arnold Schwarzenegger's movies on mid-1980s Greek TV and in a Greek bodybuilding magazine called *Athlete* that often cut and pasted articles and photos from American publications without necessarily acknowledging sources. I sweated with a chest expander at home for quite some time till I was old enough to join a gym for the first time in my home-town, Sparta.

My practice became more intense, systematic, and sophisticated when I moved to Athens for my undergraduate studies in English Literature and Culture. I devoured the international muscle magazines along with 6 meals a day and some protein powders imported from the USA and Germany for a couple of years. I also attended my first bodybuilding contest, the 1996 Mr. Hellas, and cheered for a competitor from Sparta, the same guy who owned the gym I had first joined at 15. Over a relatively short period of time, I saw drastic changes in my body and in my perception of myself and the world. For better or worse, I was not able to tell the difference between, on the one hand, the pain that results from productive training and which signals growth and, on the other hand, the pain that comes from counterproductive training and which signals injury. Eventually, though very gradually, I stopped bodybuilding. I have taken it up again recently, even if in a very different way that I assembled partly through doing the present research.

Thinking and writing this thesis has involved, among other things, the creative tasks of making unfamiliar and distant what had for years been familiar and dear, as well as the opposite: on the one hand, I had to examine 'objectively' bodybuilding culture and its traditions of looking at and experiencing one's body, those of others, and life more generally, all of which had for some time become 'second nature' to me. On the other hand, I had to manage this in the language and logic of sociological research, a new territory with its own discipline that I got introduced to when I started my PhD.

The development of the above I try to present schematically in the introduction that follows, and which I frame in terms of a genealogy of the project. I have chosen to present this not by smoothing out but highlighting a lot of the fluctuations in my thinking and writing. This attempt to do justice to my research process has involved going through what I produced in the past, and appreciating

how the reformulation of my conceptual framework and research questions has been in itself a significant part of doing the present work. The introduction concludes with the thesis chapter break-down.

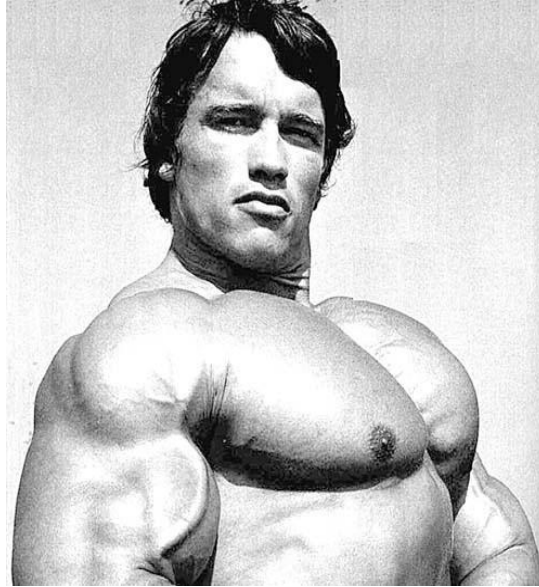


Image 1 Arnold Schwarzenegger in his bodybuilding 'prime' in the mid-1970s¹

The image above is the poster of Arnold that I cut out from a Greek bodybuilding magazine, hanged on my wall, and exercised under at the age of 12. When I grew up I found it constantly reproduced in print and online bodybuilding magazines, and considered by many in dominant bodybuilding culture as one of his most iconic images.

¹Image source: <http://www.simplyshredded.com/chest-master-how-arnold-schwarzenegger-built-the-best-chest-of-all-time.html>; ac. 08.09.2010.

Chapter 1

Introduction: Genealogy and Scope of the Project

Genealogy and Scope of the Project

The initial spark for the project was an empirical observation: bodybuilding and bodybuilders, particularly those of the 'extreme' type, are talked about as 'freaky' or 'monstrous' by both insiders and outsiders to the bodybuilding culture. For many looking from the 'outside,' the 'freaky' built body is perceived as disgusting, threatening, perverse, and/or grotesque (Lindqvist 2003; Lingis 1994). Common reactions of revulsion and derision are directed not only towards the specular built body but also what is perceived to be a whole subculture of pathology that gives birth to it (Monaghan 2001).² From the same standpoint, bodybuilding in its form as organized spectacle gets dismissively labelled as a 'freak show.' At the same time, I was equally aware of a fact that not many people outside the bodybuilding culture know or can comprehend: bodybuilders themselves habitually use the term 'freak' or 'monster' to speak of each other.³ In this case, though, the spirit is one of attribution of respect and admiration not only for what one looks like but also, and equally importantly, what they had to do to achieve it. Being recognized as a 'freak' is essentially translated into a distinct and distinguishing status in the world of bodybuilding.

While playing around with the notion of the 'freak' as a marker of radical difference, positive or negative depending on one's standpoint, I came across Cecile Lindsay's (1996) 'Bodybuilding: a Postmodern Freak Show' in the edited collection *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, which introduced me to thinking early bodybuilding in relation to the 19th century freak show. My initial research hypothesis was formulated as such: 'To what extent can modern bodybuilding be theorized as a continuation of the freak show?' This led me to an

²Suggestive of this is the sketching and recognition by medical authorities of disorders that are typically identified with practitioners of bodybuilding, such as 'muscle dysmorphia' as a particular type of body dysmorphic disorder (Pope, Phillips, and Olivardia 2000).

³When discussing the current bodybuilding culture, I sometimes use 'freak' and 'monster' interchangeably as is the case inside the culture, too.

investigation of the late-19th/early-20th century freak show as a particular cultural form and, through a naturally occurring comparative attempt, to early bodybuilding exhibitions that first took place in the same period. My parallel researching of the bodybuilding 'freak' of today had made me aware from early on that it stands for a particular type of body aesthetic and model of practice which cannot be thought separately from the frames from which it arises (namely, elite bodybuilding competition) and where it features as a central representation of bodybuilding (namely, the bodybuilding media and industry). In effect, the 'freaky' body has become a dominant representation, what 'outsiders' and 'insiders' alike recognize, even if they appreciate it differently, *as* bodybuilding. The more I researched the more aware I became -and wanted to address- the meanings and contexts particular to the organized display of the built body. Apart from my personal interest in this, I also felt there is space for original contribution in this respect in the literature on bodybuilding. It was in this light that I opted for a crystallization of the subject of my study, deciding to focus on competition bodybuilding as formalized spectacle. This decision shaped the targets and methods for my first field trip that was being planned at this juncture, and which I will discuss in detail in Chapter 3.

This was also the time I decided to focus my study on male bodybuilding for several reasons. Not only is it something I am personally more interested in, but it has been less explored in comparison to its female counterpart whose 'freakery' is typically located at its gender-transgressing quality (Aoki 1996). Given an extensive historical scope that I was increasingly leaning towards, male bodybuilding presented itself as the *de facto* object of study, its history being much longer and in important ways quite distinct from that of female bodybuilding. In some instances the latter has been useful for appreciating certain gendered aspects of its male counterpart that would have otherwise been hard to identify. Unless explicitly specified, I use the term 'bodybuilding' to refer to male bodybuilding throughout the thesis.

My exploration of the late-19th/early-20th century freak show and bodybuilding exhibitions, a good deal of which came out of or was further enabled by my first field trip archival research, led me to the conclusion that my initial research hypothesis was of an impossible nature as I was trying to compare/contrast two essentially 'different' things. Not only were the meanings inscribed in the built body and its exhibition drastically different, if not the opposite, to those of the early freak show, but bodybuilding exhibition was, precisely on the basis of the particular meanings inscribed in it, part of a much larger nexus of practices and networks.

Subsequently, I made what may appear as the 'opposite' mistake: having established that the early freak show was a 'different' thing altogether, I came to look at it as completely unrelated to my object of study. Thus, instead of looking at it in relation to bodybuilding, I moved away from any meaningful inclusion of it in my discussion. To a great extent, such a decision was made because I was essentially thinking of bodybuilding in terms of 'its own' trajectory made up of 'stages.' If something did not appear to me to be in an immediate way part of bodybuilding's 'own' trajectory, I kept it out of my scope. The result of this outlook was what I framed at the time as a focus on bodybuilding 'in its own right.' Although these decisions would eventually lead to a series of complications, at the time I thought of them as necessary steps towards clarifying my object of study. What I did hold onto from this initial phase of the research was an understanding of bodybuilding exhibition as a distinct cultural form, with a position in the cultural hierarchy and a nexus of social relations on which the spectacle was based and which it reproduced.

As I delved more extensively into the historical and comparative dimension of my research, I came to see that 'freakery' has been a particular, late-modern mode of framing the organised bodybuilding spectacle, and that there have been others, such as 'art,' 'ideal manhood,' 'national might,' 'sport,' and/or 'science.' Moving on from the realizations that 'freakery' is one amongst various modes of producing the bodybuilding spectacle, that a considerable aspect of all of these modes has been a particular discursive construction of bodies and contexts, and what I was looking at was dominant, organised bodybuilding culture, I chose to direct my research focus on the content and function of official discourse. This resulted to a great extent from what I felt as a need to opt for an object of study with clear boundaries. By focusing on official discourse I effectively targeted dominant representations as these had been 'orchestrated' by those organizations that at different junctures have claimed sovereignty over bodybuilding culture. My research up to that point had demonstrated that organised bodybuilding culture had been throughout its history significantly integrated, in the sense that a handful of key players had occupied a variety of structurally central positions that, among other things, allowed them to impose their meanings. This is what had diachronically enabled them to exert their influence from their operating nuclei to the rest of the world, mainly through the bodybuilding media directly or indirectly affiliated with them. By deciding, thus, to focus on official discourse I could provide an account of centrally-produced, dominant representations without having to examine how these were received at the

various places they reached or how they shaped embodied practices.

This research focus was eventually revisited for two reasons. Firstly, although the aforementioned plurality of dominant framings should have been retained and used synthetically, in reality it caused me for a prolonged period to lose a guiding narrative thread for my discussion. Secondly, exclusive emphasis on representations left undiscussed a wider picture that involves models of embodied practice and the ways the organized culture is structured and practically operates. What I did retain as valuable from this phase of the research was an appreciation of competing models of bodybuilding that have existed and how the power to define and represent has been a central stake in antagonisms between these models. These realizations made me investigate in more detail and identify these centres of meaning-making and those voices that, implicitly or explicitly, represented key players, were produced and instrumentally mobilized in the context of a particular balance of power in bodybuilding culture, had the semblance of authority that other voices lacked, and were perceived as 'representative' of bodybuilding due to, among other things, their international dissemination through the specialised media. How this investigation is reflected in my choice of primary sources is something I discuss in Chapter 3.

The next phase of the project was shaped by my engagement with Bourdieu's work on culture and sport. My examination of competing models of bodybuilding was awakening me to the various continuities and discontinuities which I tried to identify at the level of analytical categories, and more specifically those Bourdieu employs. As a consequence, I shifted my thinking and writing in terms of specific categories of analysis, such as model of embodied practice/relation to the body, models of sport competition, constitution of a field, structural autonomy, function of organised competition, forms of capital and conversion thereof, position in cultural hierarchy, and struggles for legitimacy. In retrospect, my engagement with Bourdieu's work during this prolonged period was in some ways overwhelming. *Distinction* (1984), in particular, introduced me to a sociological theoretical prism and language that I had not been previously familiar with. My radical adoption of much of the above was partly fuelled by an anxiety regarding my prior educational formation; even my writing style which, up until then, reflected my literature background is something I moved away from largely because it came to ring as rather vague and not sociological enough.

Although I continue to be embedded to Bourdieu as will become evident throughout the thesis, the early impact of the encounter led me to certain impasses.

Not only did I start thinking and writing strictly in terms of the categories of analysis mentioned above but I also tried to use them to structure my whole project. Drawing on Bourdieu's sociology of sport that I considered as a theoretical framework for the whole project, I experimented with new research questions such as 'What is the function and functioning of the field of organised competition?' This approach included an attempt to analyse, on the one hand, the socio-economic and structural relations accounting for the formal spectacle of the built body at the different stages of organised bodybuilding culture, and, on the other hand, the meanings attached to it. This proved to be too large an undertaking as I sought to touch in a rather undifferentiated way on every aspect and across the various periods without effectively having a guiding thread in my discussion. Another way I tried to shape the thesis based on my reading of Bourdieu was to break down the chapters along individual categories of analysis, with each chapter discussing one category across different periods. Again, leaving myself without any sense of guiding thread, the enormous data I had collected became an uncontrollable sea. Significantly, this approach proved impossible also because thinking bodybuilding in terms of a 'field of organized competition' across time assumed such a thing always existed. On the contrary, my data, in conjunction with a perspective that I was gradually developing with my supervisor's help, was demonstrating that such continuity could not be established at the level of signification, organization, or model of practice.

Finally, I returned to the notion of the 'freak' as a guiding thread for the whole thesis, incorporating Bourdieu's analytical categories more organically into my discussion. I need to stress that it has not been my intention to exhaust the meanings of 'freak' or trace a detailed genealogy of the concept. Rather, I have used it as a compass indicating directions for an analysis that would include developments in terms of bodybuilding culture's 'own' trajectory and its relationship with wider culture. While researching the dominant present in particular, I came to locate different levels for thinking the 'freak:' namely, as a particular body aesthetic, model of embodied practice, aesthetic of representation, group identity, and type of commodified spectacle. This identification of different 'levels' for thinking the 'freak' has helped me structure the relation between my chapters and the sections in each of them. Although it functions to a great extent as a foundation for my discussion, it can also be thought as a finding that only came about after considerable research.

This unpacking of the notion of the 'freak' led me to identify specific developments that account for the currently dominant paradigm in bodybuilding,

namely the late-modern operation of a field of elite performance, a competition model that in both its amateur and professional versions emphasizes winning, a culture of specialization and enhancement of performance, a global community of practice and identity, a model of corporate entertainment whose extreme spectacles and rationality get exported to the rest of the world, and the ways all the above are understood as 'logical' aspects in a particular conception of 'human nature' and 'progress.' All this I was able to appreciate in light of the dynamics of a dominant bodybuilding culture that, although marked in the last 20 years by insular tendencies and a self-definition as 'distinct' and 'distinguished' in opposition to a 'hostile' and 'misinformed' 'outside,' has been reproducing and even expanding itself through its global reach.

Having identified the above aspects of today's dominant paradigm, I returned to my historical data and tried to think when and how they had come about. This focus allowed me to see how the origins of today's 'freak' can to a considerable extent be traced back to a shift of paradigm that occurred in the late-1960s/early-1970s, and which I discuss in Chapter 5. Going even further back in time to the fin-de-siècle, formative stages of the culture, I was able to identify another, very different model of thinking, producing, and staging the male built body. In the process, things that I had researched during the various phases of the project but left out of my discussion as 'irrelevant' were reincorporated in the picture, enabling me to more fully situate my subject in cultural and historical context.

This revisiting, which sometimes took the form of comparisons/contrasts of today's 'freaky' body with other types of built bodies, allowed me to realize how what I was trying to understand were effectively different paradigms rather than the different 'stages' of the same thing. The case in point here is the late-modern notion of the 'freak' as an 'elite' body, and of professional bodybuilding as an organized sport. Going back in time, I found it problematic to apply such notions in the absence of a field of elite practice or of a sense of bodybuilding having been a 'sport' all along that merely got institutionalized at some point in its historical trajectory. Through this process, I gradually came to view that, inside the 'commonsensical' terms of today's dominant discourses, there are inscribed a whole universe of structures and meanings that cannot be simply transferred to another time and space. The final shape of the thesis has been in itself an attempt to elucidate the existence and incompatibility of different paradigms.

Part of what I have discussed above are realizations that allowed me to

disentangle myself to some extent from the narratives of a US-originating and globally exported dominant paradigm I had grown into as well as the analytical approaches these had enticed me into. Yet, there are other aspects to my object of study which the afore-mentioned familiarization with dominant bodybuilding culture and my analytical outlook, in conjunction with other factors (such as personal cultural background and educational formation), 'blinded' me to. The role of 'race' in particular in the various models and cultures of bodybuilding I have identified is something that, as I came to realise at an advanced stage of the research, could be explored and accounted for more. In the conclusion to the present thesis I suggest specific lines of analysis in this direction that further research could engage with.

Partly out of the processes and realizations discussed in the above genealogy of the project, I have formulated a classification of organised bodybuilding culture that divides my object of study in 3 periods: early (1880s-1930s), middle (1940s-1970s), and late (1980s-present). While devising and employing tentative periodizations had initially been a practical tool for me to arrange the voluminous historical material, the final periodization I am hereby proposing also reflects some of the arguments I am making in the thesis regarding the existence of different paradigms in bodybuilding. The organized spectacle of the built body serves as an axis for much of my discussion. As I will demonstrate, in both its unmediated and mediated forms it constitutes a central space for representing notions of the 'good' body, shaping perceptions and practices in the rest of the culture. As Monaghan (2001) argues, these highly visible bodies are the models in relation to which many bodybuilding practitioners imagine and define themselves.⁴

Even though I have kept the organized spectacle of the built body at the center of my study, the scope of my discussion extends to the larger, dominant, organized bodybuilding culture, that is the nexus of meanings, practices, organizations, networks, and business models from which the organized spectacle of the built body springs from and which it reflects. By 'dominant' I refer to those bodybuilding cultures emanating from and identified with focal points of economic and cultural values (Bourdieu 1984), and which have had a significant global impact. In what I have identified as the early period (1880s-1930s), my emphasis is on the

⁴Klein (1993: 7) also brings attention to this dynamic by framing his choice of research object as follows: "[t]he ethnography I present is of elite bodybuilders [...] because by focusing on elites I could confine myself to a group that, despite small numbers, is inordinately important in its influence on the rest of the bodybuilding public."

UK and USA context. In trying to understand an organized bodybuilding culture that is only tentatively beginning to get constituted in this formative period, I have often found it helpful to trace the journeys in geographical and social space of key figures building and promoting this cult of the body. Bodybuilding is in this early period situated in the context of a larger body of theories and methods of corporeal reform that is physical culture. For the middle period (1940s-1970s) my focus rests on the USA context that gradually becomes the nucleus of a global paradigm in bodybuilding, motored by conglomerations of bodybuilding media, companies of bodybuilding technologies, and governing bodies for competition bodybuilding. Designed to reach a global public, this US-based paradigm has the semblance of authority and appears as representative of bodybuilding culture as a whole even if it is defined by specific cultural and economic environments. The research that has been done so far on what I have termed the late period (1980s-present), as well as my observations and personal experience as a practitioner in the places I have lived so far (Greece, Germany, the UK, and Denmark) demonstrate the capacity of this dominant paradigm as the central meaning-maker. It is in relation to its hegemonic model that practitioners outside the USA and/or its dominant model discuss and define themselves. Its import on a world-wide audience, which appears to me to have so far been reinforced rather than challenged by the spread of the Web, is evident in the adoption of its vocabularies, imageries, and rationalities, a process entailing a cultural translation that often remains only partially possible.

Chapter Break-Down and Synopsis

Chapter 1

Introduction: Genealogy and Scope of the Project

Chapter 2

Literature Review: Works on Bodybuilding and Beyond that Have Helped Shape the Project

This chapter presents the overarching literature that has helped me think and write the project. I discuss major, as well as minor, pieces of research that have had an influence on how I have come to look at my subject. In this sense, I include works

that are dedicated to bodybuilding, as well as others that do not bear directly upon it. To some extent I try to share some of the dynamic process between the various works and aspects of the project, as well as touching upon important categories or areas of analysis that did not get included in the final scope of the thesis. The literature review is broken down by theme, even though I often found a significant degree of overlapping. The corresponding sections deal with clusters of works, and are titled 'Masculinity, Body, Subjectivity' and 'Sport and Culture' respectively.

Chapter 3

Researching Bodybuilding Cultures: Methods, Processes, and Sources

This chapter sets out the research methods I employed and explains the decisions behind the choices. Apart from discussing how I practically went about the research, I also try to show the ways in which the methods I used have been valuable for collecting data, thinking, and writing up the project. Although many of the insights I gained from my methods bleed through the entirety of the project, an effort is made to indicate specific parts of the thesis where some of them have had a central role in the way I developed the discussion. I have structured the discussion in this chapter by method, although I acknowledge their synergistic effect by bringing attention to the interaction between individual methods at different moments and stages of the research. Apart from this 'internal' interplay taking place along my various steps, I also bring attention to 'external' situations or developments that had a tangible effect on my research methods and/or process.

Chapter 4

Building 'Perfect' Bodies: The Restorative Model of the Early Period (1880s-1930s)

The present chapter examines what I have termed the early period in dominant, organized bodybuilding culture in the UK and the USA. The discussion is structured around relatively distinct contexts for displaying the built body. The first two sections explore solo displays of bodybuilders in 'high' and 'low' cultural frames respectively. On the one hand, I locate the built body in the 'high' spaces and discourses of science, art, and reform. In medical schools, health and science exhibitions, art academies, and physical culture institutes, bodybuilders explicitly related their teachings to the central problematic of individual and communal

regeneration. On the other hand, I explore displays of the built body in the 'low' spaces of the popular amusement industry, and in particular as one-man shows on European music hall and American vaudeville stages. The third and final section of the chapter looks at group displays of built bodies in the format of organized competition, focusing on pivotal events in the UK and the USA. Drawing comparisons and contrasts with other cultural forms, I attempt to understand the operation and place of the bodybuilding spectacle in contemporary cultural hierarchies. In the process, I argue how the organized displays of 'perfect,' 'classical' bodies reflect an early model of bodybuilding that placed a premium on moderation, all-around development, and the restoration of the 'natural' body.

Chapter 5

From 'Ideal Manhood' to 'Muscle For Muscle's Sake:': Shift of Paradigm in the Middle Period (1940s-1970s)

This chapter explores developments in organised bodybuilding culture in what I term the middle period. This is a period marked, firstly, by the emergence for the first time of national and international structures and governing bodies for bodybuilding competition; secondly, by escalating competition and the development of different factions and interests within organized bodybuilding culture. Although comparative references are made to the European context, the research focus is on the USA as it gradually emerges as the focal point of bodybuilding culture with an increasingly global influence. Structuring the discussion around two critical bodybuilding competitions, the Mr. America, sanctioned by the AAU, and the Mr. Olympia, sanctioned by the IFBB, I trace a shift of paradigm in the dominant model of bodybuilding. Looking at different systems of aesthetic criteria and rules of competition, I show how the antagonisms characteristic of this period were typically framed in terms of the 'proper' meaning of bodybuilding. A model of embodied practice and competition that prioritized all-around development, athletic ability, and the amateur sport ideal was gradually overtaken by a model celebrating specialization, professional competition, and the pursuit of bodybuilding 'for its own sake.' Central in this shift was the reconfiguration of a post-war masculinity defined by notions of 'raggedness,' 'wholesomeness,' and 'uprightness' to one marked by a late-60s/early-70s climate of affluence and hedonism that produced the male bodybuilder as both object of desire and 'achiever.'

Chapter 6

'Breaking Boundaries': 'Freaky' Bodies and the Paradigm of Elite Performance

The first of four to examine the late period of dominant, organized bodybuilding culture (1980s-present), the present chapter explores the 'freak' as the dominant body ideal of the past 30 years. The foundation of the discussion is an understanding of the appearance of the built body in organized competition as an instance of sport performance, the origins of which I have traced in the late-1960s/early-1970s (Chapter 5). The 'freaky,' 'extreme' body is rendered meaningful in the context of competition bodybuilding as a domain of elite performance. Framed in terms of a culturally-privileged model of performance and the 'breaking of barriers,' it transpires as in line with a wider system of similar activities. In this sense, the 'freaky' body is produced as an 'advanced' stage in a particular account of 'progress' towards 'bigger and better things' that shapes dominant bodybuilding culture. The self-referential logic of this unlimited pursuit of bodybuilding 'for its own sake' rests on and further reproduces a sense of tradition, criteria, and references particular to the culture. The 'freaky' body aesthetic transpires, thus, as a 'logical' step for those who know how to appreciate the 'forward movement' of a sport with its own history, practices, and hierarchies.

Chapter 7

Machine, Animal, Hardcore: 'Freak' as Dominant Approach to the Embodied Practice, Aesthetic of Representation, and Group Identity

The present chapter examines how the 'freak' represents a particular model of embodied practice that is 'hardcore' bodybuilding, interweaving seemingly antithetical elements: one the one hand, identified with the imagery and language of the 'machinic,' notions of willpower, discipline, sacrifice, and rationalization transpire as integral to a performance and efficiency paradigm prevalent in the culture since the mid-60s. Elite bodybuilders are celebrated for exemplifying the above qualities; their 'freaky' approach to the practice makes sense inside the competition model currently dominant in the culture, which contrasts vividly with earlier models discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. On the other hand, I show how the 'freak,' represented in terms of a 'positive animality,' is used to celebrate the physical and 'authentic' experience. Rather than deferred gratification, what becomes

important here is the experience of the embodied practice in-the-present. Ultimately, I show how the 'machinic' and the 'animalistic' constitutive of the bodybuilding 'freak' inform an aesthetic of 'intensity' that has become dominant in bodybuilding culture, and which partly reflects the insular direction this has taken since the 1990s. Central to this development has been the emergence of a whole community of practice and identity shaped around a common habitus. This dominant model of embodied practice, marked by notions of 'seriousness' and 'authenticity,' is central, I claim, to the articulation of a distinct and distinguishing global 'inside' in juxtaposition to a 'hostile' and 'misinformed' 'outside.'

Chapter 8

A 'Monstrous' Practice for Producing the 'Monstrous' Body: Drug Use for Bodybuilding Purposes

The present chapter focuses on drug use for bodybuilding purposes as a staple practice in dominant, organized bodybuilding culture. The first part of the chapter discusses how such drug use is understood by 'insiders' to be consistent with the dominant model of 'hardcore' bodybuilding and its logic of 'breaking barriers,' as well as enabling a notion of 'authentic' self-realization that I have traced in Chapter 7. By situating the discussion in a post-1990 USA climate of anxiety over performance enhancement, and anabolic steroids in particular, I show how drug use is a recurring feature in representations of bodybuilding culture as 'monstrous' and pathological, and ultimately, an important factor in shaping a sense of 'inside' in opposition to a 'misinformed' and 'hostile' 'outside.' The second part of the chapter examines how drug use has been central in producing the dominant 'freaky,' 'extreme' body aesthetic. Tracing the emergence of new technologies and the effects they have had on notions of the 'good'/'better' body, I show how their use fits the dominant, 'evolutionary' accounts of bodybuilding's trajectory. Thinking 'elite' bodies, the chapter concludes with a look at how performance enhancement transpires as necessary and effectively 'natural' in a model of sport competition, currently dominant in bodybuilding, that emphasizes winning.

Chapter 9

'Extreme Sport' and Corporate Entertainment: The 'Freaky' Body as Commodified Spectacle

This chapter explores the 'freaky' body as commodified spectacle. Bridging the discussion with the previous chapter, I start off by looking at the place of drug testing in bodybuilding competition, showing how it is understood as antithetical to a dominant conception of bodybuilding's 'true' meaning that I have been tracing throughout my empirical chapters. In the absence of any substantial drug regulation, a profile emerges of bodybuilding as a type of 'extreme sports entertainment.' I move on to discuss the interplay between 'extreme' bodybuilding and the wider entertainment industry paradigm, and how this informs a particular staging of the 'freaky' body. The following sections explore the current business model in dominant, organized bodybuilding culture that reflects a framing of 'extreme' bodybuilding as a spectacle of entertainment for a 'learned' public of 'insiders' ('bodybuilding fans'). I round off my discussion by bringing attention to how the organized spectacle becomes a focal point for producing an 'inside' and 'outside' to the culture. This, I argue, reflects a dominant paradigm of 'extreme' bodybuilding which, despite turning insular at a national level from mid-1990s onwards, gets reproduced and even expands through its global reach.

Further Thoughts and Projects

Chapter 2

Literature Review: Works on Bodybuilding and Beyond that Have Helped Shape the Project

Introduction

The present chapter discusses the overarching literature that has helped me think and write the project. It is by no means meant to be an exhaustive review of works on bodybuilding. Although I do discuss major, as well as minor, pieces of research dedicated to the subject, I largely do it under the prism of how they have shaped my thinking. It is for this reason that I also include works that do not bear directly on bodybuilding but have had an impact on how I have come to look at my subject. Undoubtedly, a different research project on bodybuilding, or even a similar one with a different analytical angle, would have different hierarchies of importance.

With some of the works I discuss I have had a complex relation, feeling at times both empowered and overpowered by, not dissimilar to my personal experience with bodybuilding. Throughout the years there has been a dynamic relation between the various works and where I was in my research at various moments as defined by previous trajectory, the primary data I was accessing, and my fieldwork process. I have tried in this literature review to share some of this 'interactive' process, as well as touching upon important categories or areas of analysis that did not become part of the thesis' final scope.

The decision was made to divide this literature review by theme rather than by individual works because I found this was a better way for me to retain my own 'voice.' As a result of this decision, the same work might surface in the discussion more than once, which effectively demonstrates its relevance for my project. At the same time, I was faced with the difficult task of dividing overlapping literatures and themes. Acknowledging a certain artificial element in such divisions, I have chosen to structure my discussion around two themes. The subsequent sections, which correspond to clusters of works, I have titled 'Masculinity, Body, Subjectivity' and 'Sport and Culture.'

Section 1: Masculinity, Body, Subjectivity

The majority of studies on bodybuilding have focused primarily on articulations of gender through social-constructionist and/or psychoanalytic approaches.⁵ Late-modern bodybuilding in particular has been examined in terms of gender performativity, viewed as reproducing heteronormative binarisms as well as potentially subverting such binarisms by bringing forth new and unexpected configurations of gender (Aoki 1996; Brady 2001; Fussell 1994; Heywood 1998; Ian 1995;⁶ Johansson 1998; Klein 1993; Lowe 1998; Moore 1997).⁷ The smaller body of research that includes a discussion of or is entirely dedicated to what I identify as the early and middle period of bodybuilding culture also examines the role of bodybuilding in the construction of gender (Budd 1997; Dutton 1995; Fair 1999; Hau 2003; Segel 1998). Often an understanding of bodybuilding culture across its different periods is proposed in terms of wider crises of masculinity, involving gender anxiety caused by the very pressures of hegemonic masculinity on men and/or a backlash to feminism and changing gender roles that comes to assume the form of an exaggerated, reactionary, hyper-masculinity (Kern 1975; Klein 1993).

Although this thesis does not engage in a sustained analysis of articulations of gender throughout, some of what I have identified as core traits informing the development of organised bodybuilding culture and the eventual domination of the 'freaky' paradigm are embodied in a particular masculinity and the reconfigurations it has undergone. In certain parts of the thesis the forms of this masculinity serve as a background to the analysis, while in other parts they become central to the discussion of competing models of bodybuilding and their ways of producing, displaying, and

⁵Of what has been written, the vast majority examines female bodybuilding. This seems to reflect a similar interest in lay discourse that Klein (1993: 7) notes as follows: "Although there is still nowhere near the number of women bodybuilders as there are men, they are disproportionately represented to the public because they are favourites of the media and intensely intriguing to the public."

⁶For Ian (1995: 76) bodybuilding helps men create a masculinity that "is not a natural attribute they are born with but a style they must work hard to create, a body that plays a role, a body masquerading as itself, as a hyperbolically 'sexed' look."

⁷As Lindsay (1996: 364) argues "many see in female bodybuilding a mode of personal and political resistance to an 'ideological complex of patriarchy, heterosexuality, and homophobia that equates muscularity with masculinity' in a network of hierarchical categories disadvantageous to women." For certain writers, such as Heywood (1998), bodybuilding is positively situated in the context of a larger emancipatory feminist project.

understanding the male body. I have organised the present section around core parameters of this masculinity which I try to situate in terms of both bodybuilding culture's 'own' trajectory as well as larger socio-cultural contexts in the USA and Europe. These parameters are: firstly, the emergence of an 'outward' model of masculinity-as-identity; secondly, the centrality of the body and physicality in notions of the 'authentic' male self; thirdly, the perception and treatment of the body as a site of control and reform. In my discussion of gender in this first section of the literature review I also touch upon dimensions of class, 'race,' and ethnicity to which I will return from another angle in the second section on 'Sport and Culture.'

From 'Inner' to 'Outer:' Appearances and the Male Self

The first core trait of the masculinity I discuss, and which in its inception mirrors changing social realities in the late 19th century, is what Kimmel (1994, 1996) identifies as the prioritizing of the 'outer' self over an earlier model of inwardness that defined manhood primarily as an inner quality. In a rapidly transforming social landscape, fin-de-siècle men of the industrialized West increasingly found themselves bereft of the conditions of existence that had made the 'inward' model possible. Narratives and/or the experience of a certain independence, control, and stability afforded by relative economic autonomy, political patriarchy, and preoccupation with traditional 'manly' work or pastimes in pre-industrial, contained communities collided with the experience of life in urban centers, alienated labor in the context of faceless bureaucracies, environments of anonymity, and sedentary occupations -such as office work- traditionally regarded as feminine.

This crisis in notions of the male self manifested itself in new ways of constructing gender in domains other than the workplace and one's position in the community. It was in recreation, consumption, and one's being as an 'individual' that a sense of self-determination and gendered self came to be sought. Whether in terms of body build, demeanor, dress, or leisure pursuits, being a man was increasingly imagined as a project of assembling oneself. There was a move, thus, from *manhood*, understood as the 'essence' of man as producer and social being, to *masculinity*, an identity made up of a range of traits one needs to acquire (Kimmel 1994; Rotundo 1983). As Kimmel (1996: 120) puts it succinctly, this masculinity was established not by acting on the world but on the self. This move towards gender-as-identity is

inseparable from a certain commodification of masculinity; in this light, bodybuilding as a host of technologies, services, and spectacles historically emerges in the final decades of the 19th century in Central and West Europe and the USA as one amongst a variety of available choices for 'building up' a sense of gendered self.

A crucial dimension of this model that Kimmel (ibid) stresses, and which I have found relevant to my examination of bodybuilding culture, is the need for constant proof, which in turn requires serious effort. Experienced as a site of anxiety, this is a masculinity in need of overt demonstration, expressed in the labored, spectacular nature of the effort to prove it beyond doubt, at a glance. It is precisely at this point that the role of appearances, both literal and figurative, takes on a new meaning and gravity. Exteriors are not anymore perceived as the 'naturally' flowing expression of one's way of life; on the contrary, the male self is increasingly grasped in terms of a series of appropriatable characteristics, chosen for their stylistic properties, instrumentally cultivated to 'communicate' the 'real' person. In an inversion of the relationship between 'inner' and 'outer,' appearance gets progressively elevated into proof of essence (ibid).

Given this change in the epistemological status of surfaces, bodies come to be 'read' in different ways:

One could replace the inner experience of manhood -a sense of manly confidence radiating from the virtuous self into a sturdy and muscular frame that had taken shape from years of hard physical labor- and transform it into a set of physical characteristics obtainable by persistent effort in the gymnasium [...] If the body revealed the virtues of the man, then working on the body could demonstrate the appearance of the possession of the very virtues that one was no longer confident one possessed.

(ibid)

Kimmel's arguments echo at a certain level Foucault's (1978: 168) claim that the very perception of sex identity emerging in the 19th century presumes a regulatory discourse where the surfaces of bodies are differentially marked, signified, and charged with sensibility. The muscular ideal becomes part of such a regulatory discourse where body image, texture, and shape combine to speak the 'truth' of the person. In this light, bodybuilding can be viewed as a technology of the self (Foucault 1988a) that renders the body readable in overt and particular ways, a tool for communicating messages in social space.

This emphasis on the appearing self can also be more broadly situated in what Debord (1994: 14) identifies as a particular social organization of appearances in modernity; that is an official and unofficial culture that assigns to the visible an exalted epistemological status, and on which a relatively new model of relationality comes to develop. The origins of this Debord (ibid: 17) attributes to a general western tradition in philosophy, art, and science that has prioritized the sense of sight in a rational understanding of reality. This social organization of appearances can also be interpreted in light of conditions of fragmented social interaction in urban centers. Commenting on new modes of cognition and recognition in fin-de-siècle urban settings, Bailey (1998) and Hau (2003) show how moving away from the relatively contained and transparent organization of smaller, pre-industrial communities, social interaction in contexts of anonymity comes to depend heavily on the 'look' that progressively becomes a privileged mode for communicating, indeed performing, oneself to others.

The proliferation of technologies of visualization are central to the above developments, effecting a 'frenzy of the visible' that Comolli views as a core trait of the second half of the 19th century (Comolli 1980: 122, cited in Williams 1999: 321) and which has since been both intensified and expanded. Budd (1997) and Williams (1999) discuss the double capacity of photography - in conjunction with the low-cost press and early cinema - in modernity's economy of the visually representable: a scientific medium revealing the 'objective' truth of the body and person, and an applied technology for the widespread popularisation of images and the ways of looking and understanding embedded in them. In the case of bodybuilding, live displays and mediated representations of the 'perfect' body in the specialized media gradually formed a particular language of visuality on which people rely to know the world and each other.

This production and circulation of ideal representations of the male self also comes to reinforce relational models that directly feed into the culture and economic organization of capitalism. In his analysis of bodybuilding's early period, Budd (1997: 49) shows how "[i]n the pages of fitness magazines, the articulation of a new techno-commercial order and new discursive aesthetic debates were intertwined." A logic of competition, homogeneity, and conformity through comparison is established both vertically and horizontally: on the one hand, viewing subjects are invited to compare themselves to ideal figures positioned high in the ladder of achievement of gendered selfhood. On the other hand, they are invited to compare

themselves to each other, upholding thus a competition culture of everyday life whose institutionalized version are organized competition events.

As far as the middle period of organized bodybuilding culture goes, where the focus of the thesis shifts to the USA, John Fair's work (1999, 2006) has been particularly helpful in tracing an important development in the masculinity I examine. Moving away from a post-war paradigm of 'upright,' duty-oriented, 'rugged' masculinity defined through its exclusion of the 'effeminate' and the 'unmanly,' a model of bodybuilding takes precedence from the late-1960s onwards that frames the care of oneself and one's specular body as a legitimate and eventually central concern for a sense of male self. Fair (1999) shows how this reconfiguration of a dominant masculinity is central to a model of 'pure' bodybuilding that legitimates the pursuit of bodybuilding 'for its own sake' and eventually raises body appearance to a priority for practitioners. Part of this legitimating process, as I discuss in Chapter 5, is the framing of the body's 'look' in bodybuilding competition as a type of specialized sport performance. With the corporate development of bodybuilding and its expansion through new communication technologies and networks from the late 1960s onwards (Fair 1999, 2006; Johansson 1998; Klein 1993), this model of masculinity not only becomes the dominant one in the culture but also gets to exert a decisively global influence.

Thinking the role of appearances in the masculinity I am discussing, a central problematic that seems to cut across the different periods and forms of bodybuilding culture is the public exposure of the male body. The tensions constitutive of this spectacle can be thought at two levels. Firstly, as a problem of representation: positioned as object of the gaze of a live or mediated spectator, the male assumes a role identified with notions of weakness and passivity, and traditionally assigned to the female (Kibby and Costello 1999; White and Gillett 1994). This feminizing positioning of the male body is 'counteracted' by a series of conventions of representation in bodybuilding. Particularly in the late-modern, USA-originating and globally exported model, a power-exuding, space-claiming, hyper-masculine motif has become prevalent (Fussell 1991; Johansson 1998). Whether in live displays or still and moving images, the built body is framed in a visual syntax of control, alertness and vigour, essentially portraying it as the epitome of manliness, defined in stark contrast to the feminine element: "exteriorized, strong, hard, competitive,

enduring, authoritative and active" (Potts 2000: 94).⁸

Secondly, the dimension of the built male body as an object of erotic desire renders its exposure in front of a live or mediated audience of other men potentially problematic in a heteronormative system. Some understand the bodybuilding spectacle as essentially homoerotic, an erotic display produced by men and directed to other men (Walters 1978: 295). Although gay readings of the exposed built body are certainly possible (Hooven 1995; Mullins 1992), one also needs to seriously consider the dominant constructions of this display inside bodybuilding culture: framed as an act of self-disclosure, the exposure of the male body transpires as a demonstration of achieved masculinity; a masculinity that, as discussed earlier on, needs to be constantly proved (Kimmel 1996). As Long (Long 1997, cited in Benzie 2000: 165) argues, it is on the bodybuilding stage that the body, already the locus for self-cultivation, becomes that for self-revelation, too. Entering a bodybuilding contest is often constructed as a test of masculinity, where the exposed body is identified with one's 'fundamental' self (Gaines and Butler 1981). Particularly in the culture's late period where the framing of bodybuilding as sport comes to dominate, the formal spectacle of the built body, aligned with the wider world of sporting activities, functions as a theater of (gendered) self-realization. The sensuality/sexuality of the body remain unacknowledged or neutralized in a language of sports journalism that assumes a technical tone to speak of the exposed body, and emphasizes notions of 'character-building' and 'success.' Thus, although in informal contexts and 'lay' levels of embodied practice bodybuilding is highlighted for enhancing sexual attractiveness, reproducing thus notions of the male as object of desire, in the formal context and elite level of public display/competition it is largely devoid of this rhetoric.

The diachronic perspectives laid out so far on the changing place of appearances in notions of the male self could be enriched by a consideration of social class at a synchronic level. Although the present research has not engaged in primary data collection and analysis of social class backgrounds of bodybuilding practitioners, I have found Bourdieu's (1984) discussion of class dimensions in the role of appearances and self-presentation particularly enticing. In his analysis of the economy of appearances in *Distinction* (1984), Bourdieu argues that notions such as

⁸Benzie (2000: 165) precisely discusses how the same built body can be vested with different meanings depending on context and conventions of representation adopted (e.g. 'passive' or 'active,' tensed or relaxed, alone or in company).

'self-presentation' and 'the body-for-others' are open to essentialist readings unless situated in the universe of social classes and their habitus. Having identified the main aspects of what he terms the lower-middle class experience of the world,⁹ such as initial timidity and embarrassment with one's position, language, and body, he understands the pronounced effort for self-correction by looking at oneself from the outside (through the eyes of the Other) as characteristic of this experience (Bourdieu 1984: 207-208). In fact, much of the dominant rhetoric in bodybuilding culture emphasizing the role of self-(re)presentation resonates with what Bourdieu identifies as a lower-middle class propensity for the game of impressions:

Without subscribing to the interactionist -and typically petit bourgeois-idealism which conceives the social world as will and representation, it would nonetheless be absurd to exclude from social reality the representation which agents form of that reality [...] Torn by all the contradictions between an objectively dominated condition and would-be participation in the dominant values, the petit bourgeois is haunted by the appearance he offers to others and the judgement they make of it. He constantly overshoots the mark for fear of falling short [...]

Being so linked to appearance -the one he has to give, not only to do his job, that is, play his role, to 'make believe,' to inspire confidence or respect and present his social character, his 'presentation,' as a guarantee of the products or services he offers (as in the case with salespeople, business representatives, hostesses etc.), but also to assert his pretensions and demands, to advance his interests and upward aspirations- the petit bourgeois is inclined to a Berkeleian vision of the social world, reducing it to a theatre in which being is never more than perceived being, a mental presentation of a theatrical performance...

(ibid: 253)

What Bourdieu describes as a sense of inferiority and shame of the lower-middle classes due to their close proximity to the working classes appears to account for a laboured search for and demonstration of distinction that nonetheless betrays its distance from what it aspires to identify itself with (i.e. 'high,' 'respectable' culture)

⁹The question naturally emerges at this point of how this, or any, class is defined at different times and societies, and whether 'class' can be used as an ideal construct, a fixed analytical category that needs to be 'filled' with real people and their practices. One of the ways that Bourdieu seems to me to approach class, much like culture, is as a relational concept ('the lower-middle class relation to/experience of the world'). In this instance, it acquires meaning less in terms of its concrete, time- and place-specific traits, and more on the basis of its relative position in the hierarchy of social classes.

precisely through the ways the demonstration of distinction takes place.¹⁰ For Bourdieu, it is this feature of overt effort for distinction, manifested in a tendency for 'showing off,' that radically separates the lower-middle disposition (or that of the newly rich)¹¹ from that of 'higher' registers of the middle classes where a sense of history and continuity of all forms of capital expresses itself in an appearance of effortless ease that comes across as deflecting attention through "a sort of ostentatious discretion, sobriety and understatement, a refusal of everything which is 'showy,' 'flashy' and pretentious, and which devalues itself by the very intention of distinction" (ibid: 249).

Interestingly for a project like mine, often popular as well as academic representations of bodybuilding and bodybuilders precisely paint them as 'pretentious' and 'over the top.' At the same time, inside bodybuilding culture the overt demonstration of distinction conferred by the built body is legitimated precisely on the basis of the considerable effort and self-discipline it takes to achieve it. The 'outside' criticism of this ostentatious distinction is often interpreted by those 'inside' bodybuilding culture as betraying an underlying desire to be like them, and is typically dismissed as nothing more than 'jealousy' and 'self-limiting' thinking. The overt concern with how one is perceived and the resulting 'self-inflating' aura that I have often come across in my research of the bodybuilding world, and of which individuals and factions inside the culture often accuse each other (using the term 'big flashy egos'), can be seen as an important aspect of a particular world-view. Thus, behaviours and practices that are usually interpreted in terms of gender insecurity and an ensuing tendency for over-compensation could (also) be rooted in an underlying class disposition.

Finally, Bourdieu also proposes thinking class dispositions towards appearances and self-presentation in terms of the specific emergence of a labour market where 'looks' are central:

¹⁰"...members of a group seek to distinguish themselves from the group immediately below (or believed to be so), which they use as a foil, and to identify themselves with the group immediately above (or believed to be so), which they thus recognise as the possessor of the legitimate lifestyle ..."
(Bourdieu 1984: 246).

¹¹The category of the 'newly rich' seems to me to befit bodybuilders particularly in their first stages of acquisition of a body capital they previously lacked, a change that can be dramatic especially for beginners.

The intent the different classes have in self-presentation, the attention they devote to it, their awareness of the profits it gives and the investment of time, effort, sacrifice and care which they actually put into it are proportionate to the chances of material or symbolic profit they can reasonably expect from it. More precisely, they depend on the existence of a labour market in which physical appearance may be valorised in the performance of the job itself or in professional relations; and on the differential chances of access to this market and the sectors of this market in which beauty and deportment most strongly contribute to occupational value.

(ibid: 202)

This is particularly relevant given that the present thesis contributes to sketching a picture of the gradual constitution and operation of bodybuilding as an organised culture where hierarchies of body aesthetics and practices have brought forth an occupational field, too. The dominant organised bodybuilding cultures that I am discussing, and certainly the current globalized bodybuilding industry, have been historically steeped into the spirit of entrepreneurship and salesmanship; in this world, self-presentation at all levels, from body appearance (itself recognized as a type of capital), demeanour, dress, speech, and being seen at the right places and in the company of the right people, is understood to be key to a specific conception of success and self-realisation.

The Centrality of the Physical in Notions of the 'Real' Male Self

The second core trait of the masculinity I am discussing is the privileged status of the body as a site of the 'authentic' self. Discussing the formative stages of this development in late-19th century and relating it to the focus on appearances discussed above, Kimmel (1996: 120) notes that especially in the US, "the ideal of the Self-Made Man gradually assumed increasingly physical connotations so that by the 1870s the idea of 'inner strength' was replaced by a doctrine of physicality and the body." Subsequently, "...men's bodies carried a different sort of weight than earlier. The body did not *contain* the man, expressing the man within; now, that body *was* the man" (ibid: 127).

In *Body Ascendant: Modernism and the Physical Imperative* (1998) Harold Segel traces connections between the search for the authentic self, masculinity, and a cult of physicality that he identifies as one of the main characteristics of modernity in both Europe and the USA. According to Segel's account, a long tradition of expelling

the body as illegitimate focus of attention, greatly caused by a centuries-old institutionalized religious culture, was perceived to have given birth to what many contemporaries scorned as an overly intellectual and verbal culture; one that suppressed intuition, vitality and spontaneity in favor of passivity, mediated experience and deadening rationalism. The institutionalization of the nuclear family and the predominance of female teachers in public schools were identified with patterns of upbringing and socialization that were unfavorable to the expression of a masculine ethos and the 'normal' development of young men (Kimmel 1996: 121). In light of this 'feminization of culture' (ibid: 120; Segel 1998: 2), largely produced as an issue by white middle-class men, the late-19th century cult of the body was embraced as a masculinizing remedy, imagined as a return to the 'active,' 'non-conformist,' 'authentic' self. As Segel (ibid) puts it, "the celebrants of physicality and, concomitantly, masculinity waged a gender war as well. The weakness of the rational compared to the irrational, the weakness of the mind compared to the body, the weakness of the traditional compared to the revolutionary, was 'feminine.'"

In their interpretation of the widespread popularization of fin-de-siècle body reform movements, Budd (1997), Hau (2003), Kimmel (1994, 1996) and Segel (1998) look at the fascination with and increasing institutionalization of sport as mirroring and reproducing the age's celebration of the body and 'immediate' experience. For the UK and USA that is the focus of my project, organized sport, and competition bodybuilding more specifically, came to serve not only as a social technology for reproducing an ideology of self-improvement and upward mobility, but also as a public arena for demonstrating the achievement of masculinity as individual identity. In his examination of other specific manifestations of the physicality cult that are not part of the present thesis' scope, Segel (1998) argues that Nazism as a crystallization and high point of modern racism partakes in modernity's 'masculine' glorification of the body through a particular framing of it as the unalterable, biological 'truth' and 'order' of things. It is on the basis of such an ultimate law of 'nature' that racial inferiority, and the Jewish 'variety' in particular, was believed to manifest itself in an pathologically intellectual, physically weak, feminized profile.

An aspect of the cult of the body in the last decades of the 19th and first ones of the 20th century is what certain works have identified as certain neo-primitivism (Budd 1997; Kimmel 1996; Segel 1998). Fueled in its formative stages by anti-technological as well as anti-intellectual sentiments, even if fashionable amongst

educated middle-class men, the return to the body under the neo-primitivist prism was perceived as a purifying return to 'natural' man. A notion of 'positive animality' appears to have been constitutive of this fin-de-siècle emphasis on the physical that directly or indirectly defined itself not only against the cerebral and the 'over-civilized' but also against the negative animality of the class/racial/ethnic Other that I discuss further down.

The identification of 'man' with the body as the site of the 'primal,' 'authentic' self has been a relatively constant thread in the bodybuilding cultures I examine, even though its exact meaning, cultural context, and intensity varies. At the level of sex/gender, it has been employed to imagine and produce difference on the basis of biological 'fundamentals.' From the late-1960s onwards, this is reflected in a growing fascination with hormone use, and especially testosterone which is understood to be the quintessentially 'male' hormone. Interestingly, such technological enhancements as well as the overall rationalization and control of the body involved in bodybuilding are constructed not as antithetical but compatible with and enabling a notion of 'man' as 'human animal' whose 'deep' essence must be respected and reinforced. Fussell's interpretation of the discourse of animality in late-modern bodybuilding culture shows a certain continuity with the formative stages discussed afore:

The longing is atavistic. It's a primordial return to the time when strength and sex were synonymous for survival of the species. It's the romantic idealization of a pre-lapsarian, natural man, untrammelled by thought, by knowledge of good and evil, by, in fact, knowledge. Intellect is held to be effete, essentially feminine and suspect [...]

So today's yuppies flock to the gym, one and all seeking the myth of the frontier. With the personal trainer's care, they follow blue-prints for biceps, all the while reciting homilies of self-reliance and self-determination. Through prescribed diets and methodical exercise routines, protein powder, amino acids, steroids, and a fake tan to highlight his he-ness, the Gympo turns himself into a modern primitive. It's a case of man using artifice to appear authentically 'natural.'

(Fussell 1994: 57)¹²

It is in terms of an exaltation of physicality and the body that I also approach

¹²This emphasis from late-1960s onwards on biologically-defined gender 'fundamentals' can also be thought in light of reactionary responses to second-wave feminism (Klein 1993).

the 'freaky' built body of the past 30 years. Here, the pursuit of the 'authentic' male self is framed through notions of performance and the 'surpassing of limits.' A notion of 'positive animality,' controlled, productive, and scientific, remains central. John Hoberman's *Testosterone Dreams: Rejuvenation, Aphrodisia, Doping* (2005), in particular, has helped me think bodybuilding, and especially its 'extreme,' 'hardcore' variety I focus on in the late period, in the context of a wider system of fields of elite performance that showcase this culturally-celebrated animality and its model of self-actualization.

The Reformed/Controlled Body

The third constitutive element of the masculinity I am discussing that emerges at the end of the 19th century and has since remained a constant thread in different bodybuilding cultures is the perception and experience of the body as a site of control and reform. In the formative stages of the culture in both Europe and the USA, the framing of the reformed male body as a unit of the national community borrows motifs and vocabularies from a culturally dominant discourse of degeneration (Plock 2006). Originating in a predominantly white, (upper) middle-class environment (Pick 1989), though eventually popularized and opened up to variations and different interpretations and uses, the degeneration discourse involved, among other things, anti-urban/anti-industrial strands that stressed the degenerative effects of 'modern,' 'over-civilized' life. Depending on who mobilized them and in what context, such 'anti-modern' strands were also used to speak anxieties regarding class, 'race,' ethnicity, and the new spatial and demographic relations that shaped them.

The largely white middle-class-inspired, 'rejuvenating' animality of the 'positive' kind, defined against the feminine, the physically weak, and the overly rational/intellectual, finds in this context another Other: a 'negative' animality identified with 'lower' classes, races, and ethnicities. With expanded political rights and visibility in public life, working class populations and their cultures were regarded by middle-class observers as negatively animalistic, impulsive, irrational, destructive to themselves and others; as Budd (1997: 134) puts it, "*a danger and in danger.*" Intertwined with the above were anxieties over the ethnic and racial Other that had to be reckoned with as a direct result of colonial conquests and waves of

immigration. These were also seen from a dominant white European or American 'inside' as negatively animalistic, impure, weak, effeminate and/or backward, thus counterproductive to the maintenance of a strong, cultivated and responsible body of citizens. In this sense, they were perceived as threatening to the integrity of a native element already compromised by industrial civilization. Against these Other bodies, the regulated and reformed body was produced in certain contexts as a fortifying, purifying, and masculinizing of the national community (Budd 1997; Segel 1998).

Apart from its capacity as a symbol of and metaphor for the nation/empire, the reformed male body was also that of an efficient soldier. In the formative stages of bodybuilding culture and up to the end of World War 2, the rational control and building up of the body was also situated in light of armed conflict. The training for efficiency and strength rests upon and reproduces notions of the male body as a fighting machine in the service of the national community. Research shows that the very emergence of physical culture, of which bodybuilding was a thread, is inseparable from 19th century international relations and conflicts or their imminent possibility.¹³ The promotion of physical culture methods up until World War 2 often discursively constructed them as integral to nation-building in the sense of producing both healthy, thus productive, citizens, and efficient soldiers (Kupfer 2000; Scott 2008; Wedemeyer 1994b). Their adoption in this capacity by state or state-related organizations such as the army, the police, the reformed public school, the Boy Scouts, and gymnastic associations, can be understood as part of what Foucault (1978) defines as biopower at the level of institutional management of populations.¹⁴

At the level of the individual self, this masculinity that rests on the simultaneous celebration *and* control of the physical historically emerges in line with a dominant middle-class subjectivity built on a protestant work-ethic, defined against the hedonism and effeminacy of the aristocrat as well as the self-destructive

¹³The early development of physical culture in the Germanic states was greatly related to a perceived need for breeding a strong national body, especially after defeat by the French. In the case of the Czechs, Physical Culture was institutionalized as an integral ingredient in the struggle for national independence, while in the case of Great Britain, the poor performance of the British Army in the Boer war and the disappointing statistics regarding the physical condition of army recruits had created similar concerns (Budd 1997: 15; Chapman 1994: 44-45; Segel 1998: 5).

¹⁴The approach of the male body as symbol of and basic functioning unit of the national community was of a different type and intensity in regimes such as that of Germany in the 1930s. Physical culture as part of the state's total institution was aligned with the imperative of health and fighting capacity of the 'master race' that included but was not limited to military preparedness (Segel 1998: 249).

impulsiveness of the worker (Budd 1997; Segel 1998). As Bailey (1998) argues, the body becomes a legitimate concern for the middle classes in the course of the 19th century precisely in its capacity as a site of discipline and reform; concomitantly, leisure is signified as a terrain for the duty of self-development. The framing of bodybuilding with the vocabulary of 'rational recreation,' 'character-building' and 'self-cultivation' is, thus, aligned with a broader 'respectable' discourse of 'perfection' and the training in subjectivity engendered therein (Eagleton 1990; Lambropoulos 1989).

The 'return' to the body that I have discussed in the previous section is more fully appreciated in light of class-specific male identities and the antagonisms between them. Research (Budd 1997; Kimmel 1996; Wedemeyer 1994b) suggests that, at least in its formative stages, physical culture and bodybuilding found their audience largely, though not exclusively, among males of the lower-middle classes. Having stressed the 'semantic polyvalency' of images of the beautiful and perfectible body in the early German context (Hau 2003: 201), Hau shows how a certain approach to the cult of the body distinctly marked by anti-intellectualism was characteristic of lower-middle class males. Distancing themselves both from the 'undisciplined' working classes 'below' them and the 'overly educated' middle classes 'above' them, they raised the disciplining of the body to a primary source of distinction as well as a form of capital in an emerging occupational field of services and products of corporeal reform.¹⁵ Although these class hierarchies did not exist in the exact same form in the UK and USA of the same period, other works (Budd 1997; Scott 2008) and my own archival research suggest that, at least at the level of lay practice, bodybuilding as embodied practice and ideology was particularly enticing for men of their respective lower-middle classes, typically defined as of white-collar occupation, modest formal education, often blue-collar family background.¹⁶

¹⁵For Hau (2003), Segel (1998), and Kimmel (1996), similar class-antagonisms were part of the anti-intellectualism informing the cult of physicality as well as the promotion of physical culture as an alternative to the medical establishment of the time.

¹⁶Based on data found in the correspondence columns of *Sandow's Magazine of Physical Culture*, Scott (2008: 90) argues that the readership of this English publication, and arguably its kind more generally, seems to bear distinct affinities to "an identifiable group of buyers [in the magazine market of late-Victorian Britain] who were young unmarried male office workers with some disposable income for cheap books and periodicals, but not realistic financial prospect of marriage or security for years to come."

Other works have explored the late-modern class dimension of physical discipline in bodybuilding and the centrality of notions of hard work and sacrifice for creating a sense of male integrity. For Klein (1993: 249) muscle culture has diachronically been a construct and concern of the middle classes which appropriates a working-class vocabulary in an attempt to establish a connection with more traditional, function-oriented notions of masculinity. Notions of honest, hard work and the accompanying sacred dimension of labor and effort inform linguistic formulations that have become central to the culture: *body-building*, *working-out*, *pumping-iron* are a few examples alluding to a ragged, industrial, working-class masculinity (ibid). Fussell, too, points to the adoption of 'blue-collar' motifs in what he identifies as essentially a middle-class pursuit defined by a certain 'pride-in-ownership.' Writing of the late-modern mainstreaming of bodybuilding, he notes that:

Not since the Victorian age, where corpulence was viewed as a sign of masculine prosperity, have men so stuffed themselves. Guzzling protein drinks and raw eggs, they are trying to 'fill out the frame,' to physically fill the masculine template. Not, this time, to look like bloated barons of industry, but to look like laborers. [...] Here, the muscular restructuring of the body is a form of blue-collar worship [...]

It is actually bourgeois to the core. It's materialism incarnate, with muscles replacing money as numerical gradations, as incremental units of self-worth. To keep up with the Joneses means accumulating objects, in this case amassing bodyparts -traps, abs, quads, pecs. In this life of getting and spending, your bank account is public and visible.

(Fussell 1994: 54-55)

Even if historically originating in a late-19th century European/American middle-class culture of self-improvement, the cult of the body, and of the muscular ideal in particular, has grown with the popularization of gym culture from the 1970s onwards in both Europe and the USA into a dominant trend that seems to 'bend' previously fixed culture and class barriers (Johansson 1998; Monaghan 2001). In effect, through a series of processes and technologies, some of which are explored in the present thesis, a masculinity shaped through the combined notions of the appearing, the physical, and the reformed has emerged as a blueprint of considerable global resonance.

The perfectible body can also be understood in terms of a wider move in modernity and capitalism towards rationalization (Foucault 1988b; Johansson 1998;

Weber 1976). Progressively, the reformed body becomes a site for rational management and investment of energies and desires as well as a type of capital (Kimmel 1996; Monaghan 2001). In line with Foucault's thesis on modernity's regulatory and disciplinary discourses that impose the element of docility and subjection on and through the physical body (Foucault 1977: 137), existing works on late-modern bodybuilding at both lay and competition level typically interpret the control of the body therein as an exercise in subjugation and alienation (Brady 2001; Klein 1993; Lowe 1998). Brady (2001: 219), for example, focuses on the factory-like production processes of bodybuilding, such as the excruciating training sessions, the ultra-strict diet regimens, the considerable investment in food and pharmaceutical supplementation, and the almost monastic adherence to the endeavor that frame the body as a 'product.' Qualifying or challenging this perspective, a smaller body of research gives space to the subjective experience of bodybuilding as creative and self-empowering at the level of both one's physical being (increased feelings of ability and body awareness) and self-perception (Heywood 1998; Linder 2001; Monaghan 2001).

More broadly, the reformed and perfectible body can be situated in the culturally dominant paradigm of science and technology. Writing of the early stages of this process, Dutton contends that

the 18th century's concern for scientific method coupled with the study of the body as a machine able to be controlled by scientific regimen, was now joined to a fascination with the modern notions of 'progress' and 'improvement' to awaken a new mode of understanding the human body as an object of exact calculation, capable of being perfected by advances in human knowledge.

(Dutton 1995: 99)

In a modern and late-modern secular culture of 'science' and 'progress,' a Christian narrative of the fallen body and its restoration (Steinberg 1996) is substituted for one of 'becoming whole' through the use of technology. As Armstrong (1998: 3) puts it, "[m]odernity offers the body as lack, at the same time that it offers technological compensation. Increasingly, that compensation is offered as a part of capitalism's fantasy of the complete body." Significantly for my project, the scientific reform of the body progressively turns from a restoration of a lost, 'natural' balance

to an open-ended project of enhancement. Writing of "the widespread technological refashioning of the 'natural' body," Balsamo claims that:

By the end of the 1980s the idea of the merger of the biological with the technological has infiltrated the imagination of Western culture, where the 'technological human' has become a familiar figuration of the subject of postmodernity [...] At the point at which the body is reconceptualised not as a fixed part of nature but as a boundary concept, we witness an ideological tug-of-war between competing systems of meaning, which include and in part define the material struggles of physical bodies.

(Balsamo 1996: 5)

Looking at dominant bodybuilding culture from 1970s onwards as firmly situated in the paradigm of ad infinitum technological transformation helps better appreciate its celebration of extremes and the surpassing of the 'human.' This prism allows not only for an understanding of the current 'freaky' body ideal as part and reflection of a wider, late-modern paradigm of performance and unlimited 'progress;' it also reveals that, in contrast to this development, early bodybuilding culture makes sense in an earlier modern paradigm preoccupied with a return to a given ideal of the human body and, by extension, human 'nature.'

Section 2: Sport and Culture

As discussed in the thesis' introduction, Bourdieu's work on culture, art, and sport has greatly influenced my analytical outlook, particularly when thinking bodybuilding as both a cultural form and a habitus. The connection that, according to Bourdieu (1984), can be established between *any* sport or art-related practice and a corresponding art of living is in the case of bodybuilding a very direct one, allowing me to think of the organised (elite) and wider (lay) domains as a continuum of practice and perception. Subsequently, I have merged his sociology of sport and of culture to look at organised bodybuilding as part of a wider universe of production and consumption as well as a relatively autonomous space with its own structures and meanings that mandate and signify practices in particular ways (Bourdieu 1994b, 1999).

Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984) and his theory of culture have been useful in thinking the bodybuilding 'freak' as marker of positive distinction that acquires its full radiance in light of its designation as negative distinction from the standpoint of

an 'outside,' an empirical observation that served as the spark for my project. This has enabled me to think the 'freak' in terms of a taste that is not just about body aesthetics but also a way of life.

In matters of taste, more than anywhere else, all determination is negation. And tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance ('sick-making') of the tastes of others [...] each taste feels itself to be natural –and so it almost is, being a habitus- which amounts to rejecting others as unnatural and therefore vicious. Aesthetic intolerance can be terribly violent.

(Bourdieu 1984: 56)

It is this relation between, on the one hand, body aesthetics and notions of the 'good' body and, on the other hand, models of embodied practice and ideas of the 'good' life, that surfaced in my exploration of different bodybuilding cultures, and the currently dominant 'freaky' paradigm in particular. Bourdieu's (1984) discussion of struggles for cultural legitimacy by various groups and how these are unavoidably shaped by the categories of hegemonic culture has helped me appreciate the trajectory of organised bodybuilding culture at different junctures. Central in this process has been looking at struggles over the power to define meaning, the negotiation of existing categories of distinction and the production of new ones, as well as the internalised and/or strategic differentiations between 'us' and 'them,' 'inside' and 'outside.' It is on the basis of such lines of analysis that I have sought to trace bodybuilding's trajectory within what Bourdieu terms the hierarchy of (cultural) legitimacies where "the very meaning and value of a cultural object varies according to the system of objects in which it is placed..." (ibid: 88).

Thinking Bodybuilding and/as Habitus

For those who engage intensely and durably with it, bodybuilding can be said to constitute a habitus (Monaghan 2001), that is "a structuring structure that organises practices and the perceptions of practices" (Bourdieu 1984: 170). As Monaghan (2001) convincingly argues, immersing oneself into the bodybuilding habitus involves a process of 'becoming' whereby perception of self and others, motivations for practice, and aesthetic evaluations change over time. Without denying the influence of previous backgrounds, evidenced in variations in practising

and perceiving, this thesis focuses rather on the gradual constitution of bodybuilding as a habitus that bears a certain integrated dynamic of its own. In its increasingly standardized, US-originating dominant format from the 1970s-onwards, bodybuilding, and in particular its 'hardcore' variety I explore in my empirical chapters, gets framed as a full-blown lifestyle whose axis is the embodied practice. Part of this process is its discursive construction, and experience by some, not only as all-encompassing but also as 'above and beyond' other backgrounds and identifications. Such a framing appears compatible with bodybuilding's relatively constant ideological content founded on notions of self-determination and self-making (Fussell 1994; Heywood 1998; Kimmel 1996; Klein 1993).

In this light, the project of building the 'authentic' self that I discussed in the masculinity/body/subjectivity section assumes in the late period a 'total' character, expanding across a multiplicity of practices under the dominant rubric of 'bodybuilding,' enabling and enabled by the articulation of a 'unique' community of practice and identity at a global level. Fundamental to this development has been the production of a particular taste, defined as "the propensity and capacity to appropriate (materially and symbolically) a given class of classified, classifying objects or practices, [...] the generative formula of life-style, a unitary set of distinctive preferences" (Bourdieu 1984: 173). As I discuss in Chapters 6-9, this taste accounts for the appreciation of aesthetics in the formal sense (i.e. the built body as artwork and/or instance of performance evaluated with recourse to specific criteria) but also extends to an art of living.

Models of Practice and Competition: The Different Versions of the 'Same' Thing

As in the case of culture, so in sport different approaches to the 'same' thing can exist, accounting for radically different motivations for and expectations from the practice. Bourdieu (1994b: 158) brings attention to the diversity of ways of engaging in a given activity, and how this expands when an increase in participants is accompanied by an increase in social diversification. Even more importantly for the present research, he stresses the significance of the dominant way, i.e. the social meaning attached by players that are dominant in terms of their social position and/or numbers (ibid: 162-163). Especially in my exploration of late bodybuilding culture, I have focused on a dominant, US-originating, relatively unified and globally exported

model that can be conceived and discussed independently of the adaptations it undergoes at places of reception and the inevitable social diversification entailed in such a process.¹⁷

In trying to develop a fuller understanding of the frames, practices and schemes of perception of the currently prevalent model, I have also examined competing models of bodybuilding historically. The core lines of analysis that Bourdieu offers for his sociology of sport have been helpful here; namely, definitions of bodybuilding, with the dominant meaning of a sporting activity being in itself an object of conflict, and competing interpretations being put forth in terms of the 'true' or 'proper' way of both practising and perceiving the practice (ibid: 163); frames for the organised display of the built body; evaluations of excellence (in the case of bodybuilding judgements of the 'good' body); the approach to the embodied practice and relation to the body; stratification within bodybuilding ('elite' vs 'lay' levels of practice) as well as its position in the larger hierarchy of sport and culture; and antagonisms amongst key players.

As far as competing models of elite bodybuilding go, John Fair's historical work (1999, 2003, 2006) has been essential to this thesis. These models entail different body aesthetics, aesthetics of representation, social and economic structures, significations, and philosophies of embodied practice. Fair (1999, 2006) contrasts an early model, primarily British but with an American counterpart, too, of amateurism and holistic development, to a late-modern American one of winning and specialisation of performance. The former seems to have been originally shaped by an upper-class culture and its definition of 'gentlemanly' participation, 'grace,' and 'ease.' In opposition to that lies what has come to be the dominant paradigm in bodybuilding culture: a USA-originating model of professional competition which, in its relentless emphasis on winning, financial/occupational rewards, instrumental performance, and upward social mobility re-signifies even amateur competition as its 'precursor' or 'farm system.'¹⁸

¹⁷As I discuss in the following chapter, this is reflected in my focus on dominant discourses and my interviewing of figures who have been instrumental in shaping these.

¹⁸Bourdieu identifies the exaltation of competition as a working class trait, opposed to the distance towards what is 'only only a game' and the notion of 'fair play' characteristic of the higher classes and their notion of the lofty person (Bourdieu 1984: 215).

Bodybuilding as Sport and Dimensions of Social Class

As already stated, the present research has not engaged in systematic data collection and analysis regarding social class backgrounds of bodybuilders. This section suggests potential lines for thinking class in bodybuilding as organised sporting activity. In exploring how people initially take up bodybuilding, one would have to be precise about the different motivations that exist for the practice (Bourdieu 1984, 1999). Although interest in ability, appearance and well-being appear to co-exist, it is the degree to which one dominates over the others that can provide clues as to practitioners' dispositions and their prior backgrounds. In this sense, the reach and effects of the 'health-beauty-strength' rhetoric of bodybuilding discourses can be more fully appreciated when one looks at how individuals or groups actually relate to it.

Following Bourdieu's (ibid) broader discussion of class and sport, in the case of individuals whose occupation and overall class disposition places great value on physical virility, one can logically expect to find a primary interest in the strength-building aspect of the practice. Conversely, practitioners predisposed to the value and social uses of appearances inside as well as outside their immediate fields of occupation can be expected to identify primarily with the effort for building one's look and self-presentation. The different profits one could enjoy from the practice and its variations renders bodybuilding's 'official' discourses open to different interpretations and practical applications.

As far as elite sport practice goes, thinking social class and different types of bodybuilding competition interweaves with the discussion of masculinity and subjectivity in lay practice in the first section of this literature review. With respect to the early period's (1880s-1930s) UK and USA context that is the thesis' focus, as well as in Germany, while 'lay' practitioners of physical culture and bodybuilding seem to have been predominantly of lower-middle class backgrounds, many of those engaged in 'elite'¹⁹ practice seem to have come from working-class backgrounds (manual occupations, including physical performances of various types, and little, if any,

¹⁹I place 'elite' in inverted commas here because, as I show in the thesis, in some ways it is a term and concept of a later period that cannot be applied in a straightforward way to the early period. Retaining it for lack of a better term at this juncture, I juxtapose it to 'lay' practice, and identify it with those who engaged in physical performances as both a source of income and social distinction.

formal education) (Budd 1997; Wedemeyer 1994b).²⁰

As far as the middle period is concerned and the thesis' focus on the USA, Fair's (1999) seminal research on the American focal point of strength sports and bodybuilding from 1940s-1960s, the York Barbell Club, shows that even in this period the ranks of elite practitioners engaged in formal competitions were mainly populated by manual laborers. The majority of this first York generation (1930s) did not exceed high-school in terms of formal education, while many members of the following generation (1960s) had college education (ibid: 39-46, 191-192).

Regarding the late period (1970s-present), Klein (1993) argues on the basis of the data collected for his study between 1976-1986 that the committed male bodybuilders he interviewed at the California-based, USA bodybuilding scene, most of whom had participated in organized competitions, came from blue-collar backgrounds (judging from parents' occupation) and had moderate education; almost half of them held unskilled, temporary and/or part-time jobs,²¹ while the rest were either professional bodybuilders or bodybuilding entrepreneurs.²² More recent work (Monaghan 2001) has shown, and my own research confirms, that costs of dedicated bodybuilding, which have risen alongside the toughness of competition and sophistication of elite performance, is a factor that now renders practice at the higher levels out of the reach of those without the appropriate financial resources (i.e. typically both stable and considerable disposable income). Participating, thus, in bodybuilding competition and aspiring to a career therein necessitates that one already has or soon manages to establish a reliable support system.

Moreover, following the global expansion and social diversification of gym culture and bodybuilding in the past 30 years (Johansson 1998), it seems that numbers of elite bodybuilders with non-manual occupations and/or higher formal education has risen, even if still in the minority. Still, bodybuilding competition and its model of social mobility, particularly in its format as a professional sport from the 1970s onwards, seems best 'suited' to social groups for whom their body is their

²⁰This is a finding confirmed by my own research of primary material on prominent, performing physical culturists/bodybuilders of the early period that operated in Europe and/or the USA.

²¹As Klein (1993) points out, working 'odd' jobs was often a conscious choice aiming at sustaining bodybuilding as the higher priority in one's life.

²²This can be seen as qualifying Klein's own claim that muscle culture has always been a middle-class affair where working-class language and symbols are merely appropriated and fetishized (Klein 1993: 249).

primary resource, and who -given the extreme body practices involved- will considerably risk their health in their pursuit of success, either due to lack of education about potential risks or due to a willingness to undertake those risks in order to 'make it.'

'Race,' Ethnicity, and Bodybuilding

In his discussion of physical culture in the early German context, and the issue of 'beauty' and 'race' in particular, Hau (2003: 82) claims that "physicians and life reformers frequently claimed that exceptional beauty was a sign of racial superiority. Only members of the white race, they argued, could come close to the ideals of beauty of the ancient Greeks and develop the aesthetic sensibilities necessary for the creation of great works of art." Significantly, the racial beauty discourse was often used by life reformers of the German upper-middle classes to speak of and naturalise class differences (ibid: 82-100). Lower-middle class life reformers (ibid: 84-85), on the other hand, seem to have used the rhetoric of 'race' in their adoption of a hegemonic discourse of nationalism that endowed them with cultural legitimacy as well as concrete goals (e.g. having their exercise systems adopted by the State). Segel also brings attention to the racial dimension often attached to early physical culture in Germany, clearly articulated in the first decades of 20th century, particularly in its manifestation as a mass movement and its perceived contribution to 'racial hygiene' (Segel 1998: 211-212).

The picture in the UK and USA, which constitute the focus of the present thesis, bears important differences. Some research highlights the egalitarian aspect of bodybuilding's rhetoric of self-making that stressed the power of the individual for self-determination, distinction, and even social mobility through sheer will and effort. Writing of the UK context and Sandow's influential model that shaped early British bodybuilding culture, Plock argues that it "relied on psychological determination rather than biological determinism, and thereby serves as an important historical counter-narrative to eugenics' exclusive rhetoric" (Plock 2006: 133-134). Budd (1997) situates the UK dynamic in terms of a racially and ethnically heterogeneous space not only torn by conflict and conquest but also 'unified' by processes of a capitalist economy. More specifically, he draws attention to the tension between, on the one hand, an imperialist discourse that assumed white superiority; and, on the other hand, the for-profit enterprise of the perfectible body that, in

actively targeting the empire's global space as an extended market, 'bent' or circumvented to a smaller or larger degree hierarchies of 'race' and ethnicity.

Representations in early bodybuilding magazines of colonial subjects on the periphery of the empire did not always follow a fixed narrative of superiority/inferiority. In certain cases, typically following world tours of bodybuilders promoting their methods and products, colonial subjects were profiled as eager to enjoy the benefits of physical culture and bodybuilding which they had found to resonate with their own native traditions of strength and health that were, in turn, featured in British bodybuilding magazines (ibid).²³ In other instances where difference was emphasized between 'us' and 'them,' colonial subjects were represented as closer to the 'savage' condition. Given the anti-technological/anti-urban strands of early bodybuilding, such representations functioned in some respects to visualize the 'natural' body, and contrast it to the 'unnatural' ones inhabiting the 'over-civilised' core of the empire. With the same stroke, though, colonial subjects were at once objectified and reduced to their physicality (Mullins 1992). The bodies of colonized people were also framed as subjects for 'rational' development and discipline through 'scientific' technologies. In this light, physical culture and bodybuilding directly or indirectly transpire as products of the 'progressive,' intellectually 'superior,' 'civilizing' culture of the coloniser (Bernal 1987; Budd 1997).

Even if similar representations of 'savage' bodies are also to be found in early specialized publications on the other side of the Atlantic (Mullins 1992), it is in the US that the framing of physical culture and bodybuilding on the basis of an egalitarian message of social mobility and self-improvement everyone could/should partake in and excel seems to have been adopted with less 'qualifications.' Fair (1999: 23-25, 28) notes that physical culture itself as a host of embodied practices was largely imported to the US by immigrant populations from Central Europe who practised and organised in clubs in the USA. Noting the opportunities for 'Americanization' afforded through the medium of sport, Fair (ibid: 34) argues that training with weights served for many immigrants as "not only a link to their native culture, in which strength was admired, but a means to excel in their adopted land."²⁴

²³Budd (1997) discusses the positive depictions of the traditions of strength and health of places visited by bodybuilders both inside (India) and outside (Japan) the space of the empire.

²⁴My own examination of random issues of physical culture/bodybuilding publications of the early and middle period (particularly American magazines such as *Muscle Builder* and *Strength and Health*)

Fair's (ibid) specific focus on the York Barbell Club, formed in the early 1930s and widely recognized as one of the culture's focal points up until the 1970s, shows elite practitioners to have been mainly of Central European and Italian origin. It appears that those in charge of the team adopted a view of America as built on the inclusion of all nationalities and 'races' in search of success and self-realization (Fair 1999: 99). Contributing to victories for the USA team in international competition, whether in weight-lifting or bodybuilding, seems to have been the overarching concern, and athletes were highly publicised as success stories in muscle and strength magazines irrespectively of their racial or ethnic background (Fair 2003: 11). Interestingly, although notions of black athletes as 'genetically gifted' appear in the culture's media of the time, in a sense continuing the discourse of the 'natural/savage' body by arguing that their genes were not yet 'compromised' by technological civilisation, their success in organized sport was ultimately attributed to their larger desire and effort stemming from their disadvantaged position in larger society (ibid).

In his specific examination of the issue of 'race' in the Mr. America contest, the most prestigious bodybuilding event in the USA from the 1940s until the late-1960s/early-1970s, Fair (2003) argues that there can be no conclusive judgement as to whether black bodybuilders (typically winning sub-awards but not the overall Mr. America title until 1970) were discriminated against. In some cases, aesthetic criteria that assumed a Caucasian body ideal seem to have come into play, attributing to black bodies 'objective' structural shortcomings. Equally important is the contemporary model of competition which I discuss in Chapter 5, signifying the Mr. America as an event in search of representatives of 'ideal manhood.' In this context, white bodybuilders could have been viewed by those judging contests and running the bodybuilding industry as better suited to serve as representatives of 'American manhood,' partly in light of a predominantly white market/ audience. The first black bodybuilder who eventually won the prestigious title in 1970 is understood to have "played the game by the white man's rules" by presenting himself as a 'cultivated,' 'well-spoken,' 'all-around' individual and athlete (ibid).²⁵

To the above model one can juxtapose that which became dominant from the 1970s onwards. Crystallized in the Mr. Olympia competition, it defined bodybuilding

attests to the regular featuring of 'stars,' success stories, or even writers whose names reflect Central European or Italian origin.

²⁵Even though Klein uses pseudonyms in his study, it is clear he makes the same point while referring to this well-known elite bodybuilder (Klein 1993: 52).

as a 'straight' sport; by framing muscular development as an instance of sport performance and the sole criterion in evaluations, it seems to have done away, at least formally, with other criteria of excellence (such as 'personality' and 'general appearance') and techniques of evaluation (interview in front of a judging panel) employed in the Mr. America model that could more directly leave room for 'race,' ethnicity and/or class to play a role. In this sense, promoting the more egalitarian 'muscle for muscle's sake' model in bodybuilding competition, which I show in Chapter 5 to be the foundation of the late-modern dominant paradigm, can be thought to have entailed an active opening up to larger populations, including 'race' or ethnic minorities. Historically coterminous with wider shifts in civil rights and opportunities for participation, this new model, originally instituted in the USA and subsequently spread to the rest of the world, 'coincides' with black bodybuilders beginning to achieve regular victories in major competitions. In the past 30 years elite black bodybuilders have had an exceptionally strong presence in the international professional championships, although, as Klein (1993: 58) notes of other sports, the rank and file of black athletes might face disadvantages that their elite counterpart does not. Despite the self-designation of the culture as a space of meritocracy where 'race,' or any other identification for that matter, is irrelevant to success (ibid; Ben and Joe Weider 2006), the large representation of black bodybuilders in the elite athletes' ranks is yet to be reflected in other important positions of power, such as officials of governing bodies, judges of competitions, or editorial staff for the bodybuilding media.

Chapter 3

Researching Bodybuilding Cultures: Methods, Processes, and Sources

Introduction

Setting out and explaining why I decided to use particular methods, this chapter essentially discusses what I thought I needed to see or expose myself to in order to understand what I was researching. The narrative I adopt to discuss my methods and the various discoveries I have made through them is also meant to introduce a picture of my subject of study. Apart from demonstrating how I practically applied the methods, I also try to show the ways the methods I used, all qualitative, have been valuable in collecting data, thinking, and writing up the project. Although most of the insights I gained from my methods bleed through the entirety of the project, an effort is made to indicate specific parts of the thesis where some of them have a central role in the way I develop my analysis.

I have structured the discussion in this chapter largely by method, allowing for some chronological ordering in certain sections. It needs to be noted that this division of methods is in some ways artificial. What effectively happened and it is important to bear in mind is the 'interaction' between individual methods at different moments and stages of the research. In light of this, the methods are best appreciated in their synergy. Apart from this 'internal' interplay taking place along the various steps of the project, I also bring attention where relevant to 'external' situations or developments that had a tangible effect on my research methods and/or process.

Field Trips Specifications

A total of four field trips were undertaken in the context of this thesis. The first field trip (October-November 2004, partly funded by the Central Research Fund of the University of London) was to multiple destinations in the USA, namely New York, Seattle, Los Angeles and Austin. It involved 9 interviews, participant observation, and archival research. All the contacts and bookings concerning access

to the archival material had already been arranged and a good number of the interviews had been set by the time I applied for the fund. My second field trip was to Essen, Germany (April 2007, self-funded) where I conducted participant observation and 4 interviews at FIBO, the largest bodybuilding and fitness exposition outside of the USA. It had not been possible to arrange interviews in advance so contacts were made during my actual visit to the event. My third field trip was to Sparta, Greece (June 2007, partly funded by the Department of Sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London) where I conducted participant observation and 5 interviews at the NABBA Bodybuilding and Fitness World Championships. Interviews were arranged prior and during my attendance at the event. My fourth and last field trip (October-November 2007, partly funded by CRF)²⁶ was again to the USA. The destinations were New York, Los Angeles and Dallas for participant observation, archival research and a total of 16 interviews.

Observing People, Places, Events

Although participant observation is a method that I came to automatically employ in various settings of my research, I focus here on some critical occasions and spaces I attended during my field trips, and in particular bodybuilding competitions, gyms, and industry events. During these visits, I tried to hold on to the incredible amount of impressions by taking photos, collecting objects, and keeping notes either on the spot or soon after. In retrospect, I regret not recording sounds, for it would have provided me with a potentially insightful dimension of what I was investigating.

The encounters I discuss below, and particularly those of the very first trip, marked a passage of sorts from my previous relation to and experience of dominant, organized bodybuilding culture, largely idealized and mediated, to a more critical and detached one. My observations at the different sites enabled me to arrange my other methods anew as well as better appreciate what was coming out of them. The insights coming out of my participant observations have 'soaked' my project throughout, in that, even though they bear directly on my discussion of the present,

²⁶This trip was supposed to have taken place the year before. A health condition had prevented me from using my grant but I reapplied and was fortunate enough to be given the opportunity once again.

they also shaped the way I came to view the past. I try below to indicate where they become more visibly significant in the thesis' chapters, though I sense them as an 'invisible' connective tissue across the project.

1st field trip (USA)

With my sights set on the organized spectacle of built bodies, I approached my first field trip as an opportunity to see from up-close what I had known as 'bodybuilding' through the global media of the dominant culture. My first crucial experience was attending the 2004 Mr. Olympia contest in Las Vegas. I had been told by various 'insiders' that nothing comes close to what has been the pinnacle of professional bodybuilding competition for almost 4 decades now, and whose global prestige other events around the world try to appropriate by borrowing the name, such as the Mr. Olympia in Pakistan or the Mr. Olympia in Spain. As I witnessed it, the event was a space where bodybuilding history, or rather a particular version of it as I was later to realize, came alive: champions of the past and the present, leading figures of the bodybuilding 'movement,' grand institutions, names and symbols that have come to exercise their power in the culture in an automatic fashion, all seemed to form a coherent, unified universe. Bodybuilding's holy monster, Arnold Schwarzenegger, made an appearance, too, at the event's climax, presenting the winner and 'super-freak' Ronnie Coleman with his 7th Mr. Olympia trophy. Even though disappointed with my childhood hero who, in his capacity as Governor of California, took the opportunity to promote Bush's Republican Party national elections campaign, I could see the status he still masters in a bodybuilding culture that celebrates mythic figures and miracles of self-transformation.

This was also an opportunity to witness up-close elite built bodies performing as well as the make-up and comportment of the audience. The 6000 spectators filling the arena were an integral part of the dynamics: gathered for a whole bodybuilding lifestyle weekend from all over the world, though mainly from the USA, they seemed to know how to fully and 'properly' appreciate what was taking place, aware that they were part of a distinguished moment which would be endlessly represented in the culture's discourses. The space of the event was also revealing of what was going on. Having walked a bit around the 'unreal' land of Las Vegas, I came to see the 'freaky' bodies on the Mr. Olympia stage as a perfect fit with the array of 'extreme' spectacles

the city has to offer around the clock. Many of these observations at bodybuilding's 'ultimate' event that serves as a model for 'lesser' ones informed how I came to think and discuss, particularly in Chapters 6 and 9, the 'freaky' body in light of both an 'insider' public as well as the larger paradigm of a corporate entertainment industry.

On the same occasion, I visited the largest bodybuilding industry event of the year, the 2004 Mr. Olympia EXPO. Adjunct to the contest, the EXPO was a large event and business venture in its own right. Taking place in the convention centre at the Mandalay Bay Hotel and Casino on the Las Vegas Strip where the Mr. Olympia was held, it was full of all sorts of entrepreneurs and potential interested customers. Roaming in its vast space, I saw 'monster' companies of bodybuilding technologies exhibiting their wares, often employing well-known bodybuilders to endorse them and work their booths. I recognized almost all of them from having seen their advertisements in magazines and/or seen or tried their actual products sold in 'health food' stores and gyms in Europe.

Everything pertaining to bodybuilding that one wanted, one could find there; the whole experience of the EXPO made me more acutely aware of how bodybuilding gets packaged as a full-blown lifestyle. Part of this equation was sharing the same space with the culture's 'stars,' getting photographed with them, buying their autographed pictures or merchandise, or simply staring at their 'extreme' bodies in the flesh. I was struck both by the 'outlandish' quality of their bodies observed from up close, as well some real-life moments that I could not have sensed in the mediated world of the bodybuilding magazines and websites, such as the well-practised, mechanical, sometimes forced smiles of celebrity bodybuilders when posing for a camera, or the awkward handshake between the peculiar kind of strangers that is a 'celebrity' and their 'fan.' I also caught myself being caught up with taking photos instead of immersing more fully in the moment of it all. In a sense, I did not differ from the crowds in attendance who also held their cameras up high and/or tried to get as close to the elite bodybuilders in order to get a better photo, preferably with themselves in it, to keep it as a cherished moment for personal recollection and/or share it with the rest of the bodybuilding community by uploading it on the Web.

My experience at the EXPO allowed me a more direct understanding of the 'star'/'fan' dynamic that permeates a global bodybuilding culture, and juxtapose it to its representations in the bodybuilding media. A central aspect of this interaction is not only the production of a certain status for elite bodybuilders as exemplary figures

of the bodybuilding lifestyle, but also the production of the 'freaky' built body as a kind of visual commodity in itself as well as a gateway to a galaxy of commodified technologies of the self. In this sense, I became more aware of an entrepreneurial ethos characteristic of organized bodybuilding culture that vividly manifests itself in spaces and occasions such as the EXPO. This initial rich experience prompted me to subsequently locate and interview key figures who had been in charge of the EXPO in order to find out more about how this business works. It also led me to research more the roots of this model by further engaging with historical material. The data collected by combining these methods has informed my discussion across the culture's different periods, though it is particularly in Chapter 9 where I focus on the business 'factor' in the (re)production of the 'freaky' body.

During my first field trip to the USA, I also visited and observed some of the world-renown 'hardcore,' 'real' bodybuilding gyms. These were important for my project not only as the physical spaces for the formation of 'freaky' bodies but also as symbolic spaces critical for the formation of a sense of group identity and common history. Gold's Gym at Venice Beach, California, known as the 'Mecca of Bodybuilding' is where, according to dominant accounts in the culture, the modern era of bodybuilding began. The original location I looked for and found a few blocks away has been immortalised in the 1977 documentary film *Pumping Iron* that introduced bodybuilding and Arnold Schwarzenegger to the American and subsequently global mainstream. The images of that space and the bodies in it in the film, growing in stature with the passing of time, is what many in the culture quote as the spark that got them into bodybuilding. It was these same images that I had watched with friends back home that excited our imaginations and got us 'fired up' for the gym in the mid-1990s.

The current location is now one amongst many in what has become the global chain of Gold's gyms; yet, if the gym is the temple of the body, Gold's Gym in Venice is a shrine amongst temples (Moore 1996). Endlessly represented in bodybuilding discourses, it is branded as the institution that has produced the sport's elite. During my visit I felt in some ways not that different from the pilgrims taking photos outside the building, posing right next to its recognizable logo. While walking around to get the feel of the place, I bumped into several of the bodybuilding 'stars' that I had known from the pages of the internationally circulated muscle magazines and/or Hollywood movies. Some of them were doubly present: not only in the flesh but also looming in large posters high on the walls, a tangible manifestation of the culture's

hierarchy of achievement and distinction.

Like Gold's Gym, Powerhouse Gym in Long Island, NY, and 5th Avenue Gym in Brooklyn, NY, I located and visited in their capacity as the 'serious,' 'hardcore' type of bodybuilding gyms. I observed all the qualities that placed them in this revered category: a combination of high-tech machinery and free weights that included extremely heavy barbells and dumbbells, a tell-tale sign that advanced practitioners are here 'pushing their limits,' an overall atmosphere of training intensity encouraged by the gym's management, and many 'extreme' built bodies walking around. Powerhouse Gym in particular, was distinctly recognizable to me, having served as the setting for a constant flow of training videos of elite bodybuilders that had, by the mid-2000s, become a staple attraction on the bodybuilding websites I was researching.

Like the rest of the experiences of this first field trip, these gym visits were instrumental in developing a critical perspective on the culture. Part of that was getting a direct glimpse into not only the bodies but also the dynamics and identities generated in those spaces. It was on the basis of this look from 'up-close' and/or 'inside,' coupled with my interviews and historical research, that I was then able to return to dominant representations and think anew how they come about and what their role is in visualizing a particular model and history of bodybuilding for a global audience. All this influenced my thinking across the empirical chapters, and is most evident in Chapter 7 where I discuss the model of embodied practice that is 'hardcore' bodybuilding and how a sense of identity and distinction emerges out of it.

2nd field trip (Germany)

The target of my second field trip, this time to Essen, Germany, was the 2007 FIBO Bodybuilding and Fitness Exposition. Being the largest of its kind outside USA soil, it is one of the events that gets consistently reported on in the global bodybuilding media, a reflection of and boost for its significance. While there, I observed how the exposition was modelled after the larger ones I had attended in the USA. A large number of companies, with a greater representation from Europe-based ones, exhibited and sold a multiplicity of products, ranging from food supplements and exercise equipment to audiovisual material on bodybuilding science and history. Judging from names and languages spoken around me, the crowd in the event was

largely from Central and Eastern Europe, a sign of bodybuilding's rapid expansion into the countries of the former communist block. Although no formal competition event was adjunct to the EXPO, there were several organised displays in the format of 'guest posing' by elite bodybuilders of national and international fame. For the former, I learned, this was an opportunity to perform 'at home' in front of a large audience and attract the attention of potential sponsors. For the latter, it was a way to solidify and expand their 'fan-base' abroad, as well as make money by charging fees for performing on-stage. The reception the most high-profile bodybuilders enjoyed, disproportionately enthusiastic when comparing their actual performance with that of their fellows sharing the same stage, I saw as a clear indication of how central the global bodybuilding media are in shaping the 'scene' and producing hierarchies of importance. For the promoters of the EXPO, the appearance of these prestigious bodies was their main selling card for both advertising the current event as well as gradually building it into an institution in the industry.

Attending FIBO enabled me to see how a business and entrepreneurship model perfected in the USA is transferred to other parts of the globe. This further awakened me to how, through events like this and their representations, a particular image and definition of bodybuilding is shaped; one that, owing to its standardized circulation in different parts of the world, gets reproduced not only as practically dominant but as 'commonsensical' too. A significant part of this picture which became vividly evident is the symbolic weight of the USA-based 'scene,' and a certain exotic allure it carries especially for those outside the USA. Some of these insights have influenced the writing of specific chapters: for example, appreciating how the professional 'scene' is framed as the sport's pinnacle and the motivation for practice this engenders is something I discuss in Chapter 6; the dynamics of a USA-originating dominant bodybuilding culture that, in its 'extreme' direction, remains relatively marginal at a local or national level but expands at a global level is something I mostly touch in Chapter 9.

3rd field trip (Greece)

The observations from my previous trips and the contacts I established at my FIBO visit in particular, along with favourable logistics, were the deciding factors for attending the Bodybuilding and Fitness World Championships of the National

Amateur Body Building Association (NABBA International) in Sparta, June 2007. Having experienced the USA-centred professional 'scene' both at its heart and its periphery, I sought a different type of bodybuilding competition to put the dominant paradigm in perspective. The event contrasted grippingly with my previous experiences. An amateur competition with no economic rewards or immediate career prospects for the participating bodybuilders, it was held in front of an uninitiated audience. The majority of the spectators, mostly residents of a provincial place for whom events in the town's square -where the contest was held- are always an attraction, watched the performing built bodies on the stage without appreciating much of how they got to look or be presented that way.

Nevertheless, the USA-based 'scene' was in some ways as relevant and present as it was distant. Not only could I spot its influence on the conventions of body presentation, but it also emerged as a recurring point of reference in all my discussions with participants, even for the minority of those who positioned themselves critically in relation to it. Drug use for bodybuilding purposes was another aspect of a dominant bodybuilding culture of performance enhancement that was easily identifiable at the NABBA contest. This practice was evident in many a 'look' achieved by the competition bodybuilders, and none of those who I interviewed denied it. In addition to this, spending time with officials and members of the various teams that were representing their countries at the event, I had the opportunity to observe things that I could not have easily deduced otherwise. The one that stayed with me the most was the open discussion concerning the distribution of steroids, involving production, economics and global distribution as if this was a business venture like any other. This I found to be rather contrasting to the insinuation made to me by a high-ranking official (who had been present to the aforementioned discussion), not to bring the bodybuilders I would interview 'in a difficult position,' effectively advising me against asking questions regarding use of bodybuilding drugs.

Moreover, being voluntarily involved in the registration of the competitors on the day before the contest provided me with an insider's perspective on some organizational aspects of such events. Spending considerable time alongside those involved in the promotion and running of the event allowed me to see the business side of such an enterprise, and to further appreciate competition events as one among various business ventures in the bodybuilding industry. The more 'crude' aspects of this struck me as rather contrasting to the 'high-minded,' formal language of

organized sport used in the organization's official website, and in particular the section on its profile and history. Having observed from quite up-close high-ranking officials during these 'real-life' situations, it also became obvious to me the extent to which during our interviews they had assumed -through a combination of vocabulary, tone, and refinement of manners- a certain public persona, namely that of official representatives of a governing body, if not of bodybuilding in general. Such instances during fieldwork allowed me a glimpse into what Goffman (1990) terms the different types of 'front' and 'backstage' in the various performances that make up social interaction, making me reconsider my interviews under this prism.

4th field trip (USA)

The last event where I conducted participant observation, this time in the context of my second field trip to the USA, was the NPC Nationals in November 2007. This decision to attend the largest amateur contest in the USA, and a stepping stone to the professional ranks of the sport, was in order to gain a fuller view of the different worlds that make the field of elite performance that is competition bodybuilding and the relations between them. Although technically an 'amateur' contest, like the previous one I had attended in Sparta, it was very different in its relation to the upper echelons of dominant bodybuilding culture. Here, I witnessed how the professional 'scene' was for many not only a reference point but a concrete dream, the 'next step' in bodybuilding as a career. These elite bodies were well on their way to 'otherworldliness,' both in the sense of embodying the 'out-of-this-world,' 'freaky' body aesthetic, and of striving for entry into that other, 'higher' world of the 'pros.' Staying around until late at the lobby of the hotel where the contest had been held, eavesdropping, watching, and chatting with elite bodybuilders, I got a better grasp of their personal stories in this journey of embodiment. Experiencing them at this moment of their journey allowed me to appreciate more fully their motivations for practice and hierarchies of worth I discuss in Chapters 6 and 7. As in the case of the other events I attended, these direct observations allowed me to put into perspective how things get represented: watching video coverage leading up to the event and reading the subsequent reports in the bodybuilding media further elucidated what gets in the story and the image, how, and why.

Interviewing

The total number of interviews I conducted was 34, including 3 repeats, all semi-structured. Over time, I re-evaluated my interview questions, a process that reflected my insights and interests at the different stages of the research. Building on my various field trips and my ongoing contact with different literatures, I crafted considerably the design of my interviews to bring the critical issues under consideration into sharper focus. My initial decision to do interviews was in order to get insiders' accounts of the development, current state, and direction of dominant, organised bodybuilding culture, as well as how this edifice practically works. In this sense, I approached them as both discourses and sources of factual information. Indeed many of the encounters, and especially the more candid ones, unveiled to me the various antagonisms amongst players in the culture, and how words, images, and people are used to produce a 'face' and history of bodybuilding in very particular ways. Based on such insights I was then able to revisit under a different prism the content and function of official representations.

Another way my interviews proved valuable was during sticking points regarding the direction and structure of the project. To unblock myself, I relied considerably on my interviews to identify recurring themes and structure my discussion out of those themes. This holds true not only for those chapters where I use my respondents' input to frame the discussion right through (e.g. Chapter 6), but also for chapters that ended up not featuring any direct quotes from my interviews (e.g. Chapter 7). In some cases, I used my interviews not only to identify but also to frame through the eyes and voices of my respondents an important dimension of the research that would otherwise necessitate a different method to examine. A clear example here is the way I have come to discuss perceptions and representations of bodybuilding from the 'outside,' that is by focusing on insiders' definitions and understandings of the 'outside' and its perceptions of their 'inside.' Another example are bodybuilding publics as an important factor for understanding the operation and reproduction of the spectacle of the 'freaky' body. Again, the way I looked at this is largely through the eyes of my respondents, that is how publics are perceived to influence the direction of the culture. While other research has touched upon similar issues (Lowe 1998), I have chosen here not a random sample but precisely respondents whose perception of bodybuilding publics has had a direct impact on actually deciding what is 'on offer' precisely because they have held significant

structural positions (i.e. contest promoters and editorial staff of bodybuilding magazines)

Of the interview questions, some were addressed to all respondents concerning their personal interpretation and evaluation of the development of bodybuilding culture, while others were group-specific. In preparation for interviews, I did considerable research on my (potential or confirmed) respondents' backgrounds, careers, and capacities of involvement in the organized bodybuilding culture. In some cases, this amounted to building over time significant records for some of the most influential individuals for whom usually a good deal of information could be obtained on the Web. I also kept records of the correspondence I had with some principal respondents, some of which carried throughout my field trips. This preparatory research allowed me to 'customise' my interviews by adding to or adjusting some of my questions to make the most out of the individual encounters.

Choosing My Respondents

While preparing for my first field trip, the research focus on bodybuilding as organized spectacle had got me thinking of the 'freak' as not only a particular body aesthetic but also a particular way of imagining and commodifying the built body. The methodological implication was to seek those involved in shaping material bodies, their dominant representations, as well as the concrete frames that bring them forth. The decision to interview elite bodybuilders of both amateur and professional status was to get their unmediated accounts regarding the 'extreme' direction of the culture and their motivations for and approaches to the embodied practice. Seeking to interview editors, writers, and photographers of renowned bodybuilding media was due to what I understood to be their crucial role as mediators and partly architects of the image and concept of the 'freak.' The decision to interview those involved in the promotion and organization of bodybuilding competition was in search for an understanding of the business and operational dimensions of the organized spectacle and its place in the larger bodybuilding industry.²⁷ Significantly, the vast majority of my respondents had been involved in the culture as entrepreneurs of some type. The practical sense of the field they had developed was something I was especially

²⁷Despite repeated efforts, I only managed to interview only two individuals currently or formerly involved as officials in bodybuilding governing bodies.

interested in from the start of the project, and its significance in how the culture is reproduced became increasingly clarified through the combination of the research methods employed.

Apart from people at the heart of the dominant organized culture, some of whom occupied key positions, I also sought and interviewed people that have always positioned themselves outside it, as well as others that identify with it even though for various reasons (resources, geographical location etc.) they practically lay far from it. Given the historical aspect of my project, I also tried when possible for my respondents' sample to bear a cross-generational dimension, too. For this reason, I interviewed individuals that have had a visible presence in the culture as far back as the early 1970s. Spanning different decades, bodybuilding cultures, and capacities of involvement, my respondents' interpretations of and approaches to the currently dominant paradigm allowed me to grasp both constants and variations over time.

Some encounters, to which I returned regularly, deeply shaped my analytical viewpoint, and I got to look at the relevant individuals as principal respondents for the project. I need to stress here that this category includes respondents who may not appear often quoted in the text, but who provided me with a valuable prism for my project. I have chosen to introduce my principal respondents at those moments in the thesis when they become most important, in an attempt to clarify what they represent in the bodybuilding world and, consequently, in my study. Sometimes, reference is made in the text to their various capacities of respondents' involvement in the culture when this is helpful for contextualizing their quotes in the overall discussion.

Contacting Potential Respondents and Introducing Myself and the Research Project

I traced contact details for potential respondents from various sources, mainly from personal websites, bodybuilding industry websites, and previous respondents. The exploratory interviews and contacts I had established during my first trip paid off in the subsequent trips, allowing me to be more efficient in both locating interview subjects and setting productive interviews. The networks I built throughout the research proved very significant in getting access to more people, which can be seen as a research finding in its own right. My principal respondents in particular were instrumental in this respect. The "tell them you've talked to me" motif proved to

be not (just) a self-aggrandising statement; as a matter of fact, several respondents quite explicitly confirmed that having mentioned someone else's name or been introduced by them made me and my request appear more 'legit.'

In their vast majority initial contacts for interviews were made through e-mail. Although sometimes adapted to individual target respondents, I used a standardised text to introduce myself, the purpose of the research, and issues of confidentiality. I deliberately included or stressed some points in an attempt to ensure interest and trust. Aware of a dominant tradition that celebrates heroic masculinities as well as Greece as the origin of bodybuilding, I explicitly referred to me originally coming from Sparta. This self-introduction seemed to count even more for my second field trip to the USA in 2007 due to the international impact the Hollywood blockbuster *300* had had earlier in the year. Set in a mythic background of Spartan discipline, sacrifice, and male honour, the built bodies at the core of the film's imagery had conquered (again) mainstream audiences. Judging from the responses I received and the interviews I eventually had, the 'Sparta connection' often proved very helpful for building a certain prestige for myself and the study.

In addition, I stressed that I have myself been a bodybuilding practitioner and fan, and that my field work was precisely to get insiders' own accounts, aiming thus at a more objective picture beyond what are perceived inside dominant bodybuilding culture to be the 'stereotypes' of the 'mainstream.' This self-designation as an 'insider' of sorts I deemed necessary in light not only of the general insular tendencies developed in the culture in the past 20 years but also specific anxieties during the periods I conducted my fieldwork. From 2004 onwards, performance enhancement in sports, and anabolic steroids in particular had, once again, been turned into a pronounced public issue in the USA.²⁸ The ensuing production of an 'us' vs 'them' mentality in bodybuilding culture and its ramifications for research I discuss more fully in Chapter 8.

Ethics and Dynamics of Interviewing

Prior to the commencement of each individual interview, each respondent was provided with a consent form approved by the Goldsmiths Ethics committee. The

²⁸Suggestive of this climate is the documentary film *Bigger, Stronger, Faster: the Side Effects of Being American* (released in 2008) with whose director I had the opportunity to discuss in an interview in my second trip to the USA.

form was designed to give respondents information they would need to decide whether to participate in this study or not. This included the nature and subject of the research, the process and purpose of audio recording, and a declaration that none of the interview data would be passed on to other parties, or published without the knowledge and consent of the respondent. Respondents were given a signed copy of the consent form for their records, were offered the choice of having a copy of the interview transcripts, and generally encouraged to ask any questions they might have with respect to the research at any point. Those respondents who are identified by name in the thesis have consented to it.

The confidentiality and private setting of the interviews allowed for the more candid voicing of opinions and interpretations which I could then use to revisit the 'official' accounts. My interviews were in some cases my only source of information of a financial and institutional nature, such as figures and ways certain key organisations work. This is an area that poses problems regarding data collection, partly because it concerns private institutions, some of which, contrary to their legal status, essentially operate for profit. 'Hard data' are not readily available from independent sources to double-check official claims. Given what was described to me as a certain secrecy and clique-like operation of key organisations, it is sometimes impossible to get *any* official data or accounts whatsoever.²⁹ Therefore, the only way I had to investigate certain claims made by respondents was to try where possible to cross-check with other respondents. Although these data are not part of the project's final shape, they were useful to me as an extra dimension to the mosaic I was trying to assemble.

Contemplating on my interviews, it is also necessary to acknowledge the factor of the interview situation and the effect it might bear on the responses given. This is something that I came to pay more attention to after I had gained some experience with interviewing. I came to be more reflexive about how the way I presented myself and the research project, the framing of my questions, my comportment during the actual interview, and the use of an audio recorder could potentially affect the respondents' overall approach to the encounter and, ultimately, their responses. In some cases, the effect of the parameters above was more 'obvious,' such as in discussions about drug use and the respondents' relevant personal choices.

²⁹My inability to interview high-ranking individuals in these organizations might be seen as evidence to this, although other explanations can be offered (for example, me being viewed as an 'outsider' to the culture, possibly a mainstream journalist).

In other cases, it was less obvious, such as in questions touching upon the self-identification of the respondent as a 'representative' of bodybuilding.³⁰

Excavating the Past: My Approach to the Historical Dimension of the Project

The centerpiece in my historical research has been an investigation of formal bodybuilding displays from the time they first emerged (1880s) to the present. I used this to recreate a process of development not only of the organized spectacle as a particular cultural form, but also of the bodybuilding cultures from which it sprang forth and which it reflected. Part of the attempt to "recapture the pastness of the past" (Fair 1999: 6) has been an effort to resist perceiving the past from the viewpoint of the present. This has been an ongoing issue in my research, greatly due to my familiarity with the US-originating and globally exported dominant bodybuilding culture I had grown into. The comparisons and contrasts enabled through my historical research helped me disentangle myself from the 'naturalness' and necessity with which the dominant present makes its presence felt. In this sense, my historical work continuously conversed with and put into perspective the contemporary accounts of my respondents, and in particular those who framed today's 'freaky' body as an 'advanced' stage in bodybuilding's 'evolution.'

My interviews with historians of bodybuilding were conducive to gaining some direction through the endless volume of this data. It was largely due to these encounters that I began exploring how the production of a dominant history of bodybuilding cannot be thought outside antagonisms between important players and the interests and models they stood for. The effect of this outlook is spread throughout the project; it is mostly felt in Chapter 4 that examines the formative period of bodybuilding and its radically different paradigm, and in Chapter 5 centring on a shift of paradigm in the late-1960s/early-1970s which, as I argue in the thesis, set the ground for today's dominant model.

³⁰When faced with an interviewer (who, depending on his/her demeanor, might be perceived as 'formal' and/or representing a critical 'outside') and his microphone, one rather unavoidably assumes the role of 'representative' to an extent greater than that in ordinary life situations.

Archive Visits

The archives where I spent concentrated research time for the purposes of this project were the following:

a) The Todd/MacLean Physical Culture Collection³¹ at the University of Texas at Austin (4 days, first field trip to the USA). This is the most extensive collection of archival material on physical culture and bodybuilding worldwide, encompassing a number of individual collections. The amount of materials was immense and the guidance of the owners of the collection who are also historians of bodybuilding was critical in making the most out of my time there. I had the chance to access old and rare photographs as well as film footage of early bodybuilders and bodybuilding exhibitions, out-of-print books and magazines, training manuals, biographies of key figures in the culture, as well as publicity materials for bodybuilding displays and gymnasias. The visit included interviews with the collection owners, initial evaluation of the findings, and subsequent photocopying of selected materials.

b) David Chapman's private collection in Seattle (2 days, first field trip to the USA). Dave is the author of a detailed biography of Eugene Sandow, the figure that is considered the 'father' of bodybuilding. His collection includes rare bodybuilding magazines, photographs, books, and publicity materials from the early and middle period of the culture. As above, the visit included interviews with the collection owner, initial evaluation of the findings, and subsequent photocopying of selected materials.

c) The *FLEX* magazine archive at the former Los Angeles headquarters of Weider Publications (currently owned by giant media corporation AMI), one of the greatest international publishers of bodybuilding and fitness magazines (1 day, second field trip to the USA). I had the opportunity to access rare issues of this key bodybuilding publication, and was kindly given some of those to keep.

At the time of the visits these collections could not be accessed from the UK. Subsequently, parts of these materials have become available on the Web, too. With the advent of the Web and data transmission technologies, formerly private or institutional collections have now entered the domain of the global public. Accessing on-line archives on bodybuilding and physical culture has proved very useful at

³¹Currently the H.J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports.

different stages of the research, most notably www.maxalding.co.uk, www.sandowplus.co.uk, www.sandowmuseum.com, and www.musclememory.com. The first three have been invaluable in providing a wealth of primary sources on the very early period of bodybuilding and physical culture that I discuss in Chapter 4.

Global Bodybuilding Media: Primary Data Sources and Tools of Research

Global bodybuilding media have changed radically the dynamic of research during the years of doing the project. Apart from being an aspect of what I am investigating, they have also been valuable research tools, providing me with an endless pool of data. This almost unlimited access to information presented me with a set of issues regarding differentiating my sources; further down I discuss how I chose what to focus on. Although in the following sections I focus on bodybuilding magazines, I have also looked selectively at personal websites of important figures in the culture (mainly professional bodybuilders), websites of bodybuilding governing bodies, and websites of companies of bodybuilding technologies.

Bodybuilding magazines have been absolutely central in producing, reproducing, and disseminating the culture. Typically referred to as 'muscle mags,' they are ubiquitously cited by practitioners of all levels as sources of initial and continuous motivation for embodied practice and overall involvement in the culture. Reading the specialised magazines can be viewed as a staple practice of the bodybuilding habitus. In a manner that is at times explicit and instructional while at other times indirect and 'matter-of-factly,' they (re)produce a particular history of the culture, a shared body of references, and a corresponding 'learned' public.³²

Until recently, the print media had been the only way of disseminating the dominant culture globally. American bodybuilding magazines function as windows to the USA-centred 'scene' which they have been instrumental in forming. Following the 'scene' or aspiring to 'make it in the sport' are intertwined with the global impact of American culture and the exoticism of the American dream, particularly for those

³²Although they have a vested interest in this, bodybuilding impresarios Ben and Joe Weider are at some level accurately representing the role of the specialized media when claiming in their autobiography that "magazines still are the only clear windows on bodybuilding, which the mainstream sports press continues to look down on and ignore. If you don't read muscle magazines, you won't understand our sport" (Ben and Joe Weider 2006: 23).

geographically removed from the USA. This dimension of the 'muscle mags' that I observed while studying them was confirmed in my interviews with practitioners coming from various places on the 'periphery' of the bodybuilding world, ranging from Europe and the former Soviet Union to the Middle-East and Australia.

Through my interviews with key figures in bodybuilding culture I was awakened to the central function of magazines for operating and controlling the industry, which in turn influenced how I approached my historical material. Muscle magazines have traditionally been the chief vehicles for advertising a panoply of bodybuilding technologies, particularly those manufactured by the very owners of the magazines and/or their business associates. Using magazines to promote particular bodybuilding contests and industry events is also an important aspect in this power game (Fair 2006: 416). Although this function of the magazines held especially true before the advent of the Web, the latter has not radically changed the landscape in the sense that most of the bodybuilding websites with the greatest popularity are electronic versions of print mags.

Muscle magazines have been one of the primary sources for gathering data for this research project. As my respondents claim, and I have seen repeatedly argued in the culture's media, bodybuilding is a niche industry shaped by a handful of key players and the publications associated with them. Consequently, relying mainly on a few representative publications appears to me to be more than sufficient for my research purposes. I have chosen to examine those that have been the most influential and authoritative in the trajectory of the dominant culture, owing to their structural affiliations with other key organizations (such as bodybuilding governing bodies and companies), their seniority, sales,³³ and international availability in print and electronic format. A comparative look at these publications and the changes they have undergone over time affords insights into the balance of power at different junctures in bodybuilding culture, competing definitions of bodybuilding, as well as the corresponding constructions of an 'inside' and 'outside' to the culture, reflecting in the process its existence not as a monolithic entity but as a terrain of contested meanings.

More specifically, *Sandow's Magazine of Physical Culture* (1898-1907) and *Physical Culture* magazine (1899-1952) have been two of the first bodybuilding magazines in the UK and the USA respectively. Although during this early period

³³This was based on secondary sources (respondents' accounts).

networks, organizations, and models of bodybuilding culture were only beginning to be constituted and integrated, these publications represent key individual entrepreneurs that greatly shaped early bodybuilding culture, namely Eugene Sandow and Bernarr Macfadden. Further reflecting the picture of this period, these publications cover bodybuilding as one among a variety of physical culture theories and methods, as well as sports more generally.

Strength & Health magazine (running from 1932-present) represents an early model of bodybuilding where strength and athletic ability were the main tenets of the embodied practice. Affiliated with the AAU and its bodybuilding competitions, it promoted a particular masculinity of 'wholesomeness' and 'all-around development,' opposing the pursuit of 'muscle for muscle's sake.' *Muscle Builder* (running from 1953-1980, title changed into *Muscle Builder/Power* from February 1968 onwards) I chose to look at it as the mouthpiece of the competing faction of the IFBB and the Weider brothers in the late-1960s and early-1970s American context.³⁴ It signals the first systematic attempt to produce legitimacy and a frame of reference for bodybuilding 'in its own right.' I have used the data collected from these two key publications in Chapter 5 to frame my discussion of the late-1960s antagonisms and change of paradigm in dominant bodybuilding culture.

FLEX magazine (running 1983-present) targets those interested in 'hardcore' bodybuilding. Its launching was part of a diversification strategy by Weider Publications that also produced *Muscle & Fitness* and later on *Men's Health*, that is publications that although belonging to the general genre of 'muscle magazines' address and produce a different audience and model of practice. Like *Muscle Builder* before it, *FLEX* has been affiliated to the dominant governing body of competition bodybuilding worldwide (the IFBB) and at the time of its inception took over the function of the former as the journal of the organization, announcing contests, contest results, competition regulations, reporting on the scene etc. I draw regularly upon the data I collected from *FLEX* in Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 to discuss the production of a particular history of bodybuilding, a dominant model of embodied practice, and a community of identity that the publication helps shape as much as it 'serves.'

Muscular Development (running from 1964-present) first came out as an attempt to address a growing community of practitioners and consumers interested in 'pure' bodybuilding (as opposed to weight-lifting or power-lifting). Initially affiliated

³⁴In its May 1971 issue *Muscle Builder* was formally stipulated -in the context of the announcement of the IFBB constitution- as the official journal of the IFBB (*Muscle Builder*, May 1971: 6).

to the AAU, it has gone through multiple 'face-lifts' and changes in direction that reflect competing models of bodybuilding, and which I discuss in detail in Chapter 9. One of the reasons for choosing to examine *Muscular Development* is that it was the first of the bodybuilding print publications to develop a fully-fledged Internet presence which remains to this day much greater than that of its competitors that may have more print sales, and which has contributed to its establishment as one of the greatest forces in the industry's mediascape. My decision to research *Muscular Development* had an important effect on the project as key figures of the publication eventually became principal respondents who, in turn, helped me understand how the muscle mags work in relation to the bodybuilding industry.

I have based my discussion on a sample over decades which I accessed in the archives I visited in my first field trip, on digitised archives available on the Web, in gyms, and private collections, including my own. I have mainly opted for editorials, promotion of and coverage of events, profiles of prominent figures, and articles on the embodied practice of bodybuilding and the community shaped around it.

Using Images

Thinking with Stallybrass and White who argue that "[b]ody images 'speak' social relations and values with particular force" (Stallybrass and White 1986: 10), I came in the process of my research to look at body aesthetics as points of entry into a wider constellation of meanings, practices, and frames expressed and reproduced through them. The specular body and the conventions of its representation, codified on its surfaces and postures, reflect models of embodied practice, the contexts in which the built body is rendered a spectacle, as well as the different ways that spectators are invited to look at it. In this sense, thinking images of bodies has helped me develop a comparative perspective on the different bodybuilding cultures that I explore in the thesis.

An overview of the images I have used highlights shifts not only in body aesthetics per se, but also in how appearances are read, as well as the structural role of the spectacle of the built body in an arrangement of competing interests, commercial and otherwise. As far as my process of choosing images is concerned, at times I looked for them instrumentally, that is I searched for a an image with a specific trait to illustrate or clarify a particular point in my discussion; at other times an image itself proved to be a spark for a creative, fresh look on a theme that I had

already identified, or suggesting another level of analysis. This happened particularly with my own field photos that often revealed various and/or new layers of meaning that I had not necessarily perceived or 'planned' while taking them. Some of the images I use have become pivotal points of reference inside bodybuilding culture: extensively reproduced and (re-)interpreted, they mark prevalent notions of the 'good' body at particular periods and, by extension, the direction of the culture at different junctures. I have used text boxes under all images in the thesis in order to contextualize them in relation to the discussion, which typically entails situating them in terms of the meanings and references particular to bodybuilding culture. Although a variety of possible readings exists for each one of these images, I focus on a particular reading that I deem relevant to my discussion.

Chapter 4

Building 'Perfect' Bodies: The Restorative Model of the Early Period (1880s-1930s)

Introduction

The present chapter examines what I have termed the early period in organized bodybuilding culture, from 1880s-1930s. The main aim has been to discuss the core framings of the built body and its display in this formative time. In exploring the prevalent body aesthetic, conventions of representation, and spaces of display, I have used them to think the dominant model in early bodybuilding and the cultural contexts and moments that shape it in the UK and USA. Physical culture figures in the discussion of this early period as that broader body of theories and methods of corporeal reform that includes bodybuilding.

I have structured this chapter in three sections on the basis of what I have identified as relatively distinct contexts for displaying the 'perfect' built body. The first two sections explore exhibitions of individual bodybuilders in what I term 'high' and 'low' cultural frames respectively.³⁵ In the former, the built body is situated in the 'respectable' spaces and discourses of science, art, and reform. Early bodybuilders situated their embodied practice and displays in a discourse of physical development, aesthetic rationalization, and expert knowledge. In the 'serious' spaces of medical schools, health and science exhibitions, art academies, and physical culture institutes, bodybuilders related their teachings to culturally central discourses of individual and communal 'health' and 'regeneration.' Such contexts, and the associations they afforded, provided legitimacy for bodybuilders as a new type of experts, entrepreneurs, and reformers.

Moving on to the 'low' frames of the popular amusement industry, I examine displays of the 'perfect' built body as one-man shows on European music hall and

³⁵I use the category of 'high' and 'low'/'popular culture' relationally, "as process, not essence, in a series of negotiations between different, class-specific perspectives. The popular is a manifest contingency or construct, existing in discursive and therefore shifting relation to any social group" (Stuart Hall 1981, cited in Faulk 2004: 3).

American vaudeville stages. Therein, they constituted one amongst many types of body performances that, judging from contemporary directories, were a considerable, yet often under-researched in relation to verbal performances, part of such spaces of popular culture (Bailey 1986; Bratton 1986). More specifically, I discuss bodybuilders' performances and their framing as 'useful spectacle' and 'rational recreation' in light of a cultural space that was constructed and experienced as a site of concern and anxiety, predominantly on the part of middle-class observers who operated as judges and representatives of a cultural hegemony that was reflecting their growing political power (Bailey 1998; Faulk 2004).

The third section of the chapter looks at group displays of built bodies in the format of organized competition, and in particular pivotal events in both the UK and the USA. Looking at how the exhibition of built bodies was assembled in various contexts, often by the same bodybuilders, I draw comparisons and contrasts between bodybuilding as organized spectacle and other cultural forms. In the process I attempt to understand how the larger organized bodybuilding culture came to operate. Amongst the figures that appear in the text, the prominent bodybuilder and physical culture entrepreneur Eugene Sandow becomes particularly important. His journeys in geographical (originating in Central Europe, flourishing in the UK, and expanding to the USA and other parts of the world) and social space (from circus acrobat/wrestler, to strongman, to bodybuilding performer, publisher, gym owner, and 'professor' of physical culture) represent to a great extent the development of bodybuilding in the early period. I have used several images of him not only because he was a crucial figure in the globally-expanding bodybuilding culture of this early period, but also to illustrate how the same body and person were vested with different meanings in various contexts.

Bodybuilding and/as Science: the Knowable and Perfectible Body

Aligning themselves with a discourse and field of practice that by the end of the 19th century had been established as culturally central and 'respectable' (Foucault 1978), early physical culturists and bodybuilders promoted their methods and displays as scientific, the product of an expert knowledge they were putting together in the process. Titles of their publications are suggestive: *The Construction and Reconstruction of the Human Body: A Manual of the Therapeutics of Exercise* (1907), *Treloar's Science of Muscular Development: A Text Book of Physical*

Training (1904), *MacFadden's Encyclopedia of Physical Culture: Volume 5* (1912), *The Science & Art of Physical Development* (1902); touted as 'teachers' or 'professors' of physical culture, they called their gyms 'institutes,' 'colleges' or 'schools' of physical culture. In their adoption of a vision of the body as machine, they built on a host of medico-scientific discourses which both produce the body as a knowable, hence controllable, entity, and are entrusted with authoritatively representing this knowledge.

Based on a predominant epistemological model in Western philosophy, science, and art that, since the 16th century, has known the world through categories of vision, anatomy enjoyed a privileged place in a cognitive urge to decipher the workings and 'truth' of the body (Kemp & Wallace 2000). In its explicit evocation of concepts and images relating to the human anatomy, early bodybuilding spectacle operated like other visual genres of the time on the basis of what Williams (1999) terms the principle of maximum visibility: through the joint effect of muscle hypertrophy and low body-fat levels induced by regimens of training and diet, emphasis was placed on the ability to clearly see the individual muscle groups under the surface of the skin, and control their movement at will.

Suggestive of the intimate relationship between the emerging field of physical culture and the more established one of science is the serving of early bodybuilders as living anatomical models in medical schools. The built body was operated in this context as a scientific and educational tool, employed in demonstrations in front of expert audiences to point to the various details and functions of the human muscular system. In the same spirit, its photographic representations in the specialised media of the time were also explicitly framed as scientific tools for visualizing the 'truth' of the body, hence vested with an educational purpose alongside other featured representations of the human body (e.g. anatomical charts).

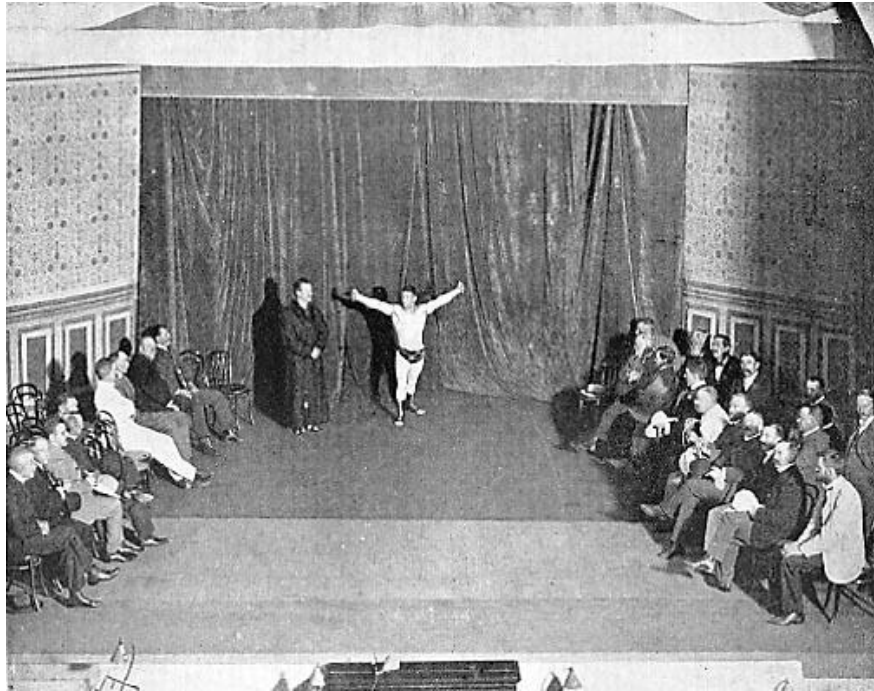


Image 2 Photo illustration from the book *Life is Movement, Or the Physical Reconstruction and Regeneration of the People* (1919)³⁶

Medical men in Brisbane, Australia, watching Eugene Sandow's pupil (centre) "demonstrating the value of physical movements carried out on strictly scientific lines." Standing beside his student, the author and prominent bodybuilder Eugene Sandow, recognized by George V as 'professor of scientific culture to the King' in 1911 (Scott 2008: 84), dedicated the book "to the medical profession throughout the world."

This will-to-knowledge embedded in modern science (Foucault 1978) was implicated in far more than a descriptive account of 'reality.' In a shift already forming since the mid-18th century, the search for an objective understanding and representation of the natural world had evolved into one for ideal forms, exemplified in the quest for classically proportioned bodies and the subsequent fascination with bodily measurements (Kemp and Wallace 2000; Petherbridge 1997). One of the manifestations of a preoccupation with so-called 'objective' physical ideals that resulted from the above shift is the array of pseudo-sciences emerging in the 19th century, such as physiognomy, phrenology, anthropometry, and craniometry. In certain contexts the canons of bodily measurements produced therein were employed

³⁶Image source: private collection of David Chapman.

for classifications of humans along intellectual and moral hierarchies (Todd 1998), including the 'scientific' formation of the category of 'race' (Petherbridge 1997).

Although partaking in a widespread preoccupation with body ideals, the early bodybuilding discourses I have examined are not defined by the pseudo-sciences above and the intellectual and moral hierarchies associated with them. Even if they shared with them a normative logic of measurements, they appear to me as relatively distinct in articulating bodybuilders' particular body hierarchies, which were in turn aligned with their own theories and technologies of reform. The 'perfect' built body, profiled as 'rationally developed,' 'efficient,' and 'well-formed,' occupied the higher echelons of these early bodybuilding hierarchies; at the other end laid the 'unhealthy,' 'weak,' 'malfunctioning,' and/or 'misshapen' body. Although the latter in many ways functioned as the Other against which the former was defined as superior, bodybuilding discourses produced these ends not as two separate, incommensurate worlds, but rather as a continuum of 'normality.' It was precisely the promise of bodybuilding as a 'scientific' technology of self-transformation that rendered this a continuum. Thus, while in other contemporary 'scientific' hierarchies the biological body, which constituted their organizing principle, amounted to an unalterable given of 'nature,' in bodybuilding it was framed as the very terrain and vehicle for agency and change.

In this light, early bodybuilders used their displays in the 'serious' spaces of science as a showcase for their various methods and products, providing publics with a concrete manifestation of their prescriptive vision of becoming. Live demonstrations of built bodies transpire, thus, as a technology for visualizing their models of 'health' and 'normality,' as well as proof of how the knowledges they promoted could be applied to materialize self-transformation. Consequently, the early 'scientific' framing of bodybuilding was not limited to a discourse of medical rationalization and body awareness, but extended to one of 'rational cultivation' of the physical self. In this capacity, it was a part of a modern aligning of science with notions of development and progress.³⁷ The very notion of the 'physique,' that is the knowable and perfectible body, can be viewed as a fruit and reflection of a paradigm of innovation and development (Budd 1997). Thus, bodybuilding displays at fin-de-

³⁷As discussed in the literature review, the import of Western/European superiority discourses on the early bodybuilding cultures I examine appears to be not of a kind that reads biology as 'natural' law and destiny, but rather of a kind that frames 'science' and 'progress' as the manifestations and 'civilizing' tools of a superior culture.

siècle world fairs and expositions are rendered meaningful in a culturally-central discourse of 'new possibilities' and 'progress.'

The various establishments of physical culture founded and run by early bodybuilders in conjunction with their specialized publications were yet another 'high' frame for the built body in more than one ways. Not only were they culturally respectable enterprises in their own right (Budd 1997; Wedemeyer 1994b), but they also operated as a distinct type of 'serious,' formal space for the (re)presentation of the built body, whether in the flesh (in gyms), or in pictures (in magazines and books). In line with a wider discourse of body awareness, education, and reform, these spaces were instrumental in establishing the 'perfect' built body and its formal display as the focal point for a field of expert knowledge and practice that was being constituted through this very process.

Classical Art: A Blueprint for 'Perfection'

Art is the other 'high' frame for early bodybuilding, and to a great extent inseparable from that of science in this period (Kemp and Wallace 2000). Informing a tradition of close cooperation between the fields of anatomy and art, the aesthetic rationalization of bodies was understood as a highly scientific enterprise. Given that the use of anatomical models had become axiomatic in art academies and studios,³⁸ physical culturists had been employed since the early 19th century both for practicing 'rational posing' and serving as artists' models (Budd 1997: 33-34). In bodybuilding publications, a visual arts vocabulary was often borrowed, and photographic representations of the built body were often referred to as 'studies.' Works of classical art were also often featured and discussed in their capacity as timeless standards of 'perfection' for both shaping and displaying the body.

³⁸From Renaissance onwards, there was established on the part of prominent artists a rhetoric of visual arts as fundamentally based on anatomical science, i.e. on a systematic knowledge of high intellectual standing; this was juxtaposed to an earlier state of things whereby art and anatomy enjoyed a lower status compared to purely intellectual endeavors due to their perception as manual occupations, crafts (Petherbridge 1997:101). Suggestive of this shift was the felt need to constantly demonstrate in their art their knowledge of the human surface musculature.

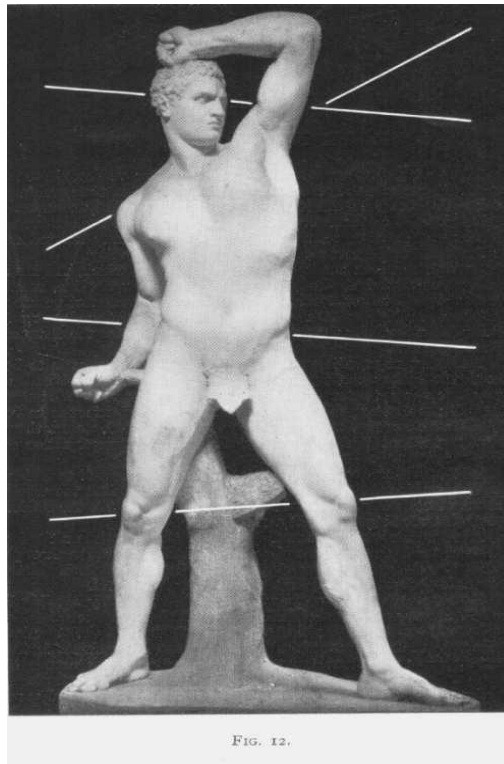


Image 3 Photo illustration from the book *How to Pose* (1914)³⁹

In the illustration above, graphics are superimposed on a photographic image of classical sculpture to demonstrate body alignment for perfect 'muscle posing.' A formalized mode of (re)presenting the built body, 'muscle posing' was profiled as not only an art but a science, too. Replete with similar illustrations explained in a distinctly technical language and instructional tone, the entire book by eminent bodybuilder of the early period, Monte Saldo (stage name of Alfred Montague Woollaston), deals exclusively with the subject. 'Perfection' transpires here not only at the level of body aesthetic but also of (re)presentation, a particular mode of visualizing the built body.

At another level, the iconography and vocabulary of classical art helped early bodybuilders frame a vision of 'normality' in their body discourses. The various physical culture movements in Europe and the USA were often steeped in an anti-modern rhetoric. In propagating a restorative model of health that celebrated the 'natural' and the 'normal,' weak, sickly and malformed bodies were understood as the

³⁹Image source: <http://www.maxalding.co.uk/HTP/htp-intro.htm>; ac. 14.08.2009.

result and expression of 'unnatural' urban/industrial environments. Against this 'imbalance' of 'modern civilization,' classical art was used to imagine an idealized, 'natural' equilibrium. The 'classical' body was seen as a concrete embodiment of this transcendental standard of perfection and harmony.⁴⁰

In bodybuilding media, works of classical art were presented not as idealized representations of a mythic time but as concrete testimonies of a period in human history. Framed, thus, as educational tools for making the past known to moderns, such representations were effectively used to visualize bodybuilders' notions of timeless 'balance' and 'perfection.' Accounts abound in the early specialized press of how renowned bodybuilders had taken up the embodied practice after coming to contact with works of classical art, either in museums at home or through travels to ancient lands (Budd 1997; Chapman 1994). In fact, this transformative experience of 'awakening' seems to have been a narrative convention in its own right. The following excerpt from the article 'How to Build a Perfect Body' relates what one of the early icons of the culture, Charles Atlas, found through 'studying the ancients' after being 'thrilled' by a visit to the Brooklyn Museum of Art:

To beautify their bodies, increase their strength and retain their glorious health the Greeks, Spartans and Romans regarded their prime duty. In fact they considered it a disgrace if any one among them lacked physical perfection. Both men and the women had large open air Courts where they exposed their undraped bodies to the healing influences of sun and air, enjoying their exercises, baths and games, which they looked upon as a sacred daily performance. Who has not been inspired by pictures of statues of these magnificent men and women of Greece and Rome? The glistening, supple beautiful bodies of human animals, charged with great strength and power must have been a rare joy to behold! [...] With the records we still possess of their mode of living, together with our modern knowledge of rational hygiene and sanitation, it is possible for many of us to be equally as perfect as were the Greeks and Romans.

(*Artists and Models Magazine*, August 1925: 42)

Significantly for my project, this discourse of 'perfection' used by early

⁴⁰As discussed in the literature review, constructions of the 'disorder' of 'modern life' variously involved anxieties regarding not only technological/industrial culture but also class, 'race,' and/or ethnicity, depending on who appropriated them and in what context. In the bodybuilding discourses that I have examined, it is an anti-technological/anti-industrial current that seems to predominate.

bodybuilders seems to point to a given ideal, literally 'set in stone.' As suggested in the piece quoted above, the maximum practitioners could aspire to was to restore this transcendental aesthetic of 'natural' order and form, a point to which I will refer back at several junctures in my discussion. Equally importantly, the above is a typical example of how early bodybuilders discursively produced the pursuit of 'health,' 'beauty' and 'strength,' as a duty. Aligned with a turn-of-the-century discourse of 'rational recreation' (Bailey 1998), taking care of oneself got framed in a language of individual responsibility and shame.

The Discourse of Art and the Respectable Masculinity of Self-Improvement

The notions of 'rational recreation' as a duty identified above were also central in the articulation of a masculinity based on notions of self-improvement (Bailey 1998; Kimmel 1996). Framed as a site of continuous effort and demonstration, this masculinity was to a great extent constituted through fears of inadequacy and judgement. In this sense, early bodybuilding discourses directly or indirectly gave form and substance to the very anxieties they supposedly documented and rectified. The hierarchies of achievement and worth concurrent with such a model of acquiring gender brought forth and were reproduced by a nexus of practices, technologies and social relations which the vocabularies and imagery of classical art help encode. These included rationally and methodically cultivating oneself, being inspired by others who have already succeeded in their quest for 'perfection,' studying their and one's own progress in search for continuous self-improvement, and seeking the experts' advice and services.

In the pages of the highly influential book *How to Pose* (1914) quoted below, the built body is envisioned as the end-result of a process of education and cultivation of body and mind. Both the production of the 'perfect' male body and its appreciation are spoken in terms of the 'higher' faculties of imagination, artistic contemplation, and mental concentration. Not only does this rhetoric place bodybuilding in a hallowed quest for beauty and form based on the most refined of human qualities; it also firmly aligns it with modernity's language of the visible and the mechanically reproducible:

It has been said that the Greeks created the ideal of human physical perfection; but we would beg to make a distinction, and propound that it was rather the supreme artistic sense of the Greeks that enabled them to perceive which was the ideal, and by their art to achieve that ideal and reproduce the same in sculpture for the education of all succeeding races. Education, or the force of example by the educated, is beginning to turn the young man of to-day from his old ambition to possess bulging biceps or protruding pectorals to a desire for a body developed in all its parts to a symmetry of form approaching the old Greek ideals of grace and beauty.

And the developed young man is also laudably desirous to obtain artificial presentments of himself [i.e. photographs] at various stages of his development, either for his own contemplation or for that of others. And he ought to be encouraged thereto; it is but obedience to the impulse of proper self-esteem. It is only the true man who has honestly striven for improvement who can possibly take a real pride in himself. By thus being able to see himself as others see him he will, if he to himself be true, be one of the first to discover his imperfections [...]

(Saldo 1914: 8)

Through a particular reading of classical art, physical culturists and bodybuilders of modest backgrounds and little formal education were able to propound a model of masculinity and distinction based on body discipline (Hau 2003). This 'high' tradition of representations of the male body also allowed for a framing of the literal exposure of oneself not as lewd but as an act of self-revelation and self-examination. Concomitantly, its subjection to a critical gaze figured as a necessary instrument for evaluating progress, or lack thereof. Coming out of a history of being combated as essentially pornographic (Walters 1978), the medium of photography gets recuperated here as a useful technology for the production of this male self.

Interestingly, the discourse of art and 'perfection' was also used in this instance to profile another body against which the 'perfect' body, and by extension the gendered subjectivity it represented, acquired its meaning. Instead of the 'weak' or 'sickly' body, it is another 'variety' of the strong/muscular body that serves here as the Other against which the 'classical' built body is defined. Writing of "the body beautiful as distinct from the merely strong muscular frame" (Saldo 1914: 7), the influential author, bodybuilder and strongman Monte Saldo argues that:

The strongman who poses before the camera for the purpose of exhibiting the abnormal development of certain of his muscles can never hope to provide a result which will excite any emotion but curiosity or purely anatomical interest, which have nothing whatsoever to do with the artistic. Art has been said to be the materialised expression of man's delight in the beautiful, and its appeal through the senses to the intellect and imagination depends to a great extent on the state of these faculties in the individual.

(ibid: 8)

Distanced from the 'disproportionate,' 'unnatural' and sometimes regarded as 'grotesque' bodies of (some) strongmen, bodybuilding was presented as 'elevated' in terms of both body aesthetic and the 'nature' of its display. Whether this hierarchical classification of varieties of the muscular/strong body was (also) used to speak antagonisms between groups of physical performers from different social backgrounds is not something I have explored in detail.⁴¹ In any case, though, these formulations, expressed in an aesthetic terminology of 'harmonious,' 'all-around' development 'inspired by education,' appear aligned with a dominant discourse, originating in the educated/upper-middle classes and subsequently popularized, that advocated 'perfection' through self-cultivation (Lambropoulos 1989).

'Perfection' as 'Natural' Body Aesthetic and Embodied Practice

As mentioned earlier on, early bodybuilders found in classical art a 'respectable' imagery, and in many ways a cultural 'origin,' for the restorative model of 'perfect health' they propounded in their magazines, books, and institutes as well as in the health and science exhibitions they participated in. At the level of body practice, the building up of the body was imagined as a natural remedy in terms of both its goal, i.e. restoring the 'normal' body, and its methods. The latter included practices that were straightforwardly 'natural,' e.g. exposure to the elements, natural therapy, avoidance of drugs and alcohol, as well as others that, even if 'artificial' in comparison, were framed as mimicking natural functions of the human animal (e.g.

⁴¹A straightforward correlation is hard to establish even for the bodybuilder-author in question, Monte Saldo, who came from a mixed background and always occupied himself as a physical performer (Webster 1992).

running, lifting) (Wedemeyer 2000). In their totality, these methods were promoted as an alternative cure to the degenerative effects of both modern industrial civilisation and orthodox medicine which was seen as part of the problem rather than a solution to it.

The holistic character of this early bodybuilding model is apparent in its large scope including the entire human constitution, evidenced in the wide variety of articles and products for different health issues, such as constipation, stress, headaches, lethargy, insomnia etc. Significantly for my discussion, it was often presented in opposition to the body practises of elite sport. Against the compartmentalized and strenuous regimens of body discipline geared towards maximum specialized performance, early bodybuilders advocated moderation and all-around development, defining 'sensible fatigue' as the guide to embodied practice (Treloar 1904:18). This restorative model of the 'natural' body was encapsulated in a particular aesthetic prevalent in early bodybuilding culture. Explicitly defined against artifice and excess, it was 'balance' and 'grace' that were held at a premium. Commenting on Charles Atlas' posing in imitation of the famous statue of the Farnese Hercules, the article below emphasizes the aesthetic qualities that define the 'good' body in this early period:

While the statue of Hercules shows him of a very heavy, massive and tremendously muscular type, close observation shows that the pectoral [chest] muscles of Charles Atlas are much larger, deeper, thicker and more full and round, while those of Hercules are quite flat. It should also be realized that the statue of Hercules has been greatly exaggerated from his original physique. So the statue shows a development that almost borders on the ugly. With Atlas and all his great strength there is no knottiness of the muscles, his form is flowing and refined, embodying the highest type of manly beauty.

(Artists and Models Magazine, August 1925: 44)

The value placed on 'natural' perfection was manifested not only in terms of body aesthetic per se, as evidenced in the quote above, but also of an aesthetic of (re)presentation more generally. Thus, in the article 'Otto Arco: Athlete Extraordinary,' the well-known bodybuilder Otto Arco is praised not only for his harmonious muscular development but equally for his ability to look 'natural' and 'at ease,' with no indication of strain while assuming his poses for the photographer's

lens (*Body Molding*, April 1925: 27-30). In a similar spirit, Antonio Salemme, sculptor and judge at a 1922 bodybuilding contest, comments on the winner of the event in the following way: "In fact he surpasses the artist's expectations. He has the gigantic cut of a heroic statue, and at the same time most elegant line and grace of movement- hard and flexible, definitely marked yet very subtle" (*Artists and Models Magazine*, August 1925: 45).

Strongmen and the Muscular Body in the Popular Amusement Industry

Moving on from my discussion of the 'high' frames, I will now turn to displays of the built body in the 'low' spaces of the popular amusement industry, and in particular as one-man shows on European music hall and American vaudeville stages. Here, bodybuilding displays developed out of strength exhibitions and contests in the early 1880s, and often remained organised around them well into the second half of the 20th century. Dating back to the last decades of 17th century, modern organized strength performances had by the end of the 19th century become an established form of popular entertainment (Webster 1982; Wedemeyer 1994a). With the advent of industrialisation and the rise of the amusement industry, strongmen repositioned themselves from the small-town or rural spaces of country fairs and carnivals to organized, touring circuses and, during the winter period, dime museums of urban centres. In those spaces, strongmen got framed as one amongst a variety of sensational spectacles of 'human oddities,' performing along fire-eaters, sword-swallowers, anatomical wonders, people with malformed limbs, excessive body hair etc. (Dennet 1997).

From 1893 onwards, strongmen gradually moved towards variety shows in music hall and vaudeville, a step 'up' the cultural ladder which can be interpreted in terms of an increased legitimacy for their performances, reflected in the inclusion of weight-lifting in the Olympic Games of 1896. It was during this period that several strongmen started including for the first time a bodybuilding exhibition segment in their live performances. My data suggests a shift towards those spaces inside the rapidly expanding amusement industry that were deemed 'upgraded,' hence adhering to standards of 'respectability' set by those fractions of the middle-classes that had consolidated their position as the ultimate evaluators of culture (Faulk 2004).

These establishments were for the most part what historians of popular

culture have come to term 'straight' or 'clean' music halls and vaudeville, an increasingly urban, corporate organisation of amusement for profit (Bailey 1998). In contrast to their tavern and pub, 'low-class,' men-only entertainment origins (Höher 1986), 'straight' vaudeville and music hall variety shows were purportedly 'elevated' in quality and taste, and suitable for all the family to attend. The 'elevated' character of the spectacles was exemplified in the regulated presentation and conduct of both performers and spectators. Coupled with significant investments in larger and more 'glamorous' venues, corporate organization, and professional management and running of the performances, such traits were highlighted to dissociate these spaces from other, 'lower' forms in the cultural hierarchy, such as dime museums, freak shows, carnivals, and fairs, which, despite their popularity, were looked down by middle-class observers as 'crude' types of entertainment (Bogdan 1988).

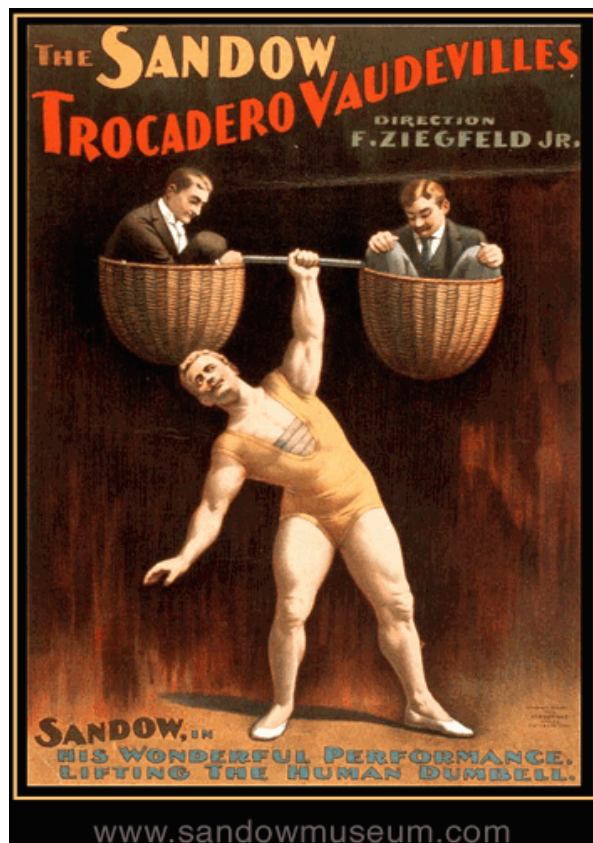


Image 4 Publicity material for Eugene Sandow's American vaudeville shows (1894)⁴²

This lithograph above is from Sandow's first USA tour, one amidst several global journeys in his career as a performing strongman and bodybuilder. The appeal of his novel spectacle was quickly appreciated by renowned impresarios of the amusement industry who promoted him as an international celebrity. In this particular image, it is the strength aspect of his displays, rather than the bodybuilding one, that is being used as a primary signifier for the performance.

"I Didn't Know These Muscles Existed!" 'Muscle Control' as Popular Science

'Muscle control' and 'muscle posing' were the two main elements of bodybuilding exhibitions incorporated in the vaudeville and music hall performances of physical culturists/strongmen whose main act consisted of feats of strength as well

⁴²Image source: <http://www.sandowmuseum.com/sandowtrocadero.html>; ac. 03.08.2007.

as often acrobatics and hand-balancing acts. During the 'muscle control' segments of the performance, the bodybuilder would flex his various muscles independently and usually to the rhythm of live music, contorting them and displaying their different configurations at will. This element of early bodybuilding exhibition capitalised on a widespread fascination with the human anatomy that constituted a popularised version of the medico-scientific discourses discussed earlier on. Framed in terms of culturally-privileged knowledges (Faulk 2004: 157), 'muscle control' provided the audience with a particular spectacle of human anatomy where the scopophilic gaze, unacknowledged in 'high' scientific frames, was openly invited and celebrated.

This popularized discourse of science was a significant aspect of the strategies bodybuilders employed to give legitimacy to their public demonstrations in 'low' cultural spaces. Reports on and publicity materials for their performances were embellished with accounts of spectators expressing wonderment in discovering the existence of muscles they previously ignored (Chapman 1994). Performing bodybuilders or their managers invited doctors to examine the anatomical structure and constitution of their muscular systems and report on their level of 'perfection,' subsequently using these reports as publicity material for their live displays (Budd 1997; *ibid*). Part of a repertoire common to other forms of popular amusement in this period, such strategies were used to produce 'hype' about the spectacles as well as lending them legitimacy by framing them as 'rational entertainment,' a point to which I will return in the following section.⁴³

'Muscle Posing' as 'High' Art

The other main aspect of bodybuilding displays, 'muscle posing,' drew heavily on popular discourses of 'high' art. In doing so, conventions were borrowed from other contemporary entertainment forms, most notably the *tableaux vivants* or *poses plastiques* (living statuary) where one or several persons assumed static poses to create a living image that faithfully represented or alluded to works of classical art (Budd 1997; Faulk 2004). In 'muscle posing,' the performing bodybuilder would

⁴³Most notably, managers, promoters and 'human oddities' of freak-shows and side-shows were quick to take advantage of the popularization of medical theories and often included in their publicity materials reports on the exhibits written by physicians, anatomists, and other medical experts who frequently visited such spaces (Bogdan 1988: 62).

assume poses derived from art representations of ancient history and mythology, typically heroic and grandiose in nature. Body make-up was introduced to produce a white marble effect, making the built body on stage resemble ancient sculpture. Emphasis here laid not on the display of individual muscle-groups but on an overall impression of 'perfection.'

The discourse of art becomes significant in this case in terms of an attempt to neutralize the problematic aspects of the public exposure of the body.⁴⁴ Based on the axiom that high art is non-sexual (Mullins 1992; Osborne 1997), the male body, nude but not naked, was transferred into the space of the aesthetically sublime rather than the erotically suggestive, or even vulgar. Similarly to other spectacles of the exposed body in the UK and USA fin-de-siècle popular amusement industry, this allowed for a framing of bodybuilding displays as a 'useful spectacle:' that is, both cultivating an audience response based on 'concentration' and 'critical attention' instead of sensual excitation and 'idleness,' as well as serving a social purpose by bringing art to the masses (Faulk 2004). Such a framing was insisted upon even, or especially, when those involved in the promotion of such performances did everything the law would allow to heighten nakedness. This was evident in various body spectacles, including bodybuilding exhibitions, and can be interpreted in light of a corporate industry where overproduction was intensifying competition over audience response (Budd 1997).⁴⁵

Using the discourse of art and 'rational entertainment' to frame a spectacle that was, among other things, commodifying male beauty, early bodybuilders preempted accusations of impropriety and lewdness. Such a strategic use of classical art conventions was common on the part of amusement institutions that aimed at an extended, family audience.⁴⁶ In doing so, they were not merely striving for a general aura of cultural legitimacy, but also a concrete shield against possible intervention by state or state-related agents overseeing the domain of popular amusement (Bailey

⁴⁴The same can be argued to some extent regarding 'muscle control' and the 'science' discourse. I have chosen to discuss the issue of disavowal of the erotic element of the display in this section as it also applies to a variety of other performances in the amusement industry that used the discourse of art for the same purpose.

⁴⁵Building on this craze for unclothed flesh, Eugene Sandow and his manager Florenz Ziegfeld Jr had the bodybuilder's performance costume changed from leotard tights to briefs.

⁴⁶Suggestive of the institutionalised prudery were the activities of anti-vice societies that opposed to any nude themes through distribution of images and live exhibition, even those emanating from classical art (Beisel 1990).

1998; Faulk 2004). Thus, in meeting contemporary standards of 'public morality,' physical performers of 'lower' social standing were essentially navigating their way around a hegemonic, upper middle-class-originating definition of culture that got enforced by anti-vice and temperance societies, county councils, and courts (Beisel 1990; Pennybacker 1986).⁴⁷

The Particularity of the Bodybuilding Spectacle in the Amusement Industry

Many of the conventions of representation and practices of early bodybuilders in the 'low' cultural spaces I have discussed were common in the broader amusement industry. Apart from the strategic uses of the discourse of art and science, one can also trace an operational rationality dictated by intense commercial competition amongst entertainment forms, and an ensuing premium placed on dramatic visual impact and novelty. This was consistent with the transformation of urban popular amusement into a corporate industry largely founded on the fabrication and relentless advertising of new products. Amongst them, live spectacles of the performing human body remained a core attraction and business venture in an era before the domination of cinema and television.

In this search for "large-scale effects, overpowering images, and incessant novelty" (Faulk 2004: 161), sensationalism became the overriding principle: the shows and bodies of performers were methodically presented as spectacles of the 'wondrous' and the 'extraordinary.' The 'hype' circulated to produce excitement for events and performers of various of these cultural forms bears testimony to the

⁴⁷The issue of nakedness and the place of classical art applied to physical culture and bodybuilding publications, too. Discussing a 1907 case of legal prosecution of renowned American physical culturist Bernarr Macfadden on grounds of indecency, Mullins (1992) shows the variety of available readings of the built body. Building its case on denotation, the defense emphasized notions of 'inspiration' and 'emulation,' that is the explicit messages conveyed by images of the exposed built body and their surrounding rhetoric. The 'proper' relation of viewing subjects to what was displayed was constructed as not one of erotic objectification on the basis of difference, but rather of identification on the basis of likeness (Mulvey 1975). Mullins (1992: 31) contends that the debate essentially revolved around a class-defined struggle over icons of Western culture: for courts and anti-vice societies, the majority of which had strong ties to the upper-classes of US urban centers (Beisel 1990; Gilfoyle 1986), the reproduction of images (in imitation) of classical art in a low-/middle-brow publication fundamentally debased them.

gradual emergence of standardized vocabularies and practices, and is concurrent with a shift from individual performances to corporate organization and management in the amusement industry (Bogdan 1988: 55, 70). So are a host of business practices that early bodybuilders shared with other entertainers of music hall/vaudeville or even 'lower' forms, such as freak shows and circuses: touring extensively, working closely with managers and impresarios, building national and sometimes global networks and audiences, and promoting themselves as celebrities largely through the methodical use of photographic images, were all part of an increasingly regularized mechanics of the amusement industry.

Despite these common elements, the display of the built body in this industry was marked by features that distinguish its content and function from those of other forms. Although present, the dimension of a 'direct' body show of sensual excitement (scopophilic, erotic, or otherwise) was consistently intertwined, if not superseded in importance, by that of the body-as-narrative. Apart from a spectacle of the 'previously unseen' and the 'phenomenal,' the built body was produced as telling a coherent story: of personal agency and empowerment through the embodied practice. What got dramatized in bodybuilding displays was a particular vision of taking one's fate into one's hands and shaping it literally and metaphorically, condensed in Eugene Sandow's promotional mantra 'you don't have to live with the body you were born with' (Chapman 1994). The primacy of this message of self-determination through body discipline was embedded in numerous conventions of the genre; among them, suggestive is the practice common amongst bodybuilders of this era to fabricate their childhood in their self-promotional writings, describing themselves as sickly and weak in their early years, only to be transformed into 'perfect' men through the training systems and products they advocated and sold (Wedemeyer 2000).

In this sense, bodybuilding displays were different from most other performances that, even when framed as 'rational entertainment,' remained exclusively forms of entertainment. A sharper contrast can be established with those forms where the exhibited bodies were framed as being bound by nature, most clearly in the case of 'human oddities.' The fact that their various biological 'anomalies' were often fabricated precisely highlights the meaning of it all. Such displays, common in freak shows, dime museums, fairs and circus side-shows, were essentially different from that of bodybuilders in that they did not visualize any

promise or vision of becoming. Instead, anatomy was staged *as* destiny.⁴⁸

In trying to understand the dynamics of the different spectacles, the 'proper' relation between viewing subject and object becomes crucial. Founded on and reproducing a gaze of curiosity, whether benign or offensive, the gist of the spectacle in freak shows and similar forms appears to be the exhibition of Other-ness (Bogdan 1988; Dennett 1996; Fiedler 1978).⁴⁹ Contrary to this, what lies at the core of bodybuilding exhibition is a vision of sameness, as the bodybuilder on stage is constructed as the ideal self of the people in the auditorium. In this sense, the 'proper nature' of the spectacle of the 'perfect' body is based on a relation of identification that ultimately excites in viewing subjects the desire to emulate what they aspire to. It is precisely this dynamic that renders the bodybuilding spectacle drastically different from other contemporary forms of entertainment not only in terms of the 'content' of the display, but its broader function that ensues from it. Thus, apart from profitable ventures in their own right, the exhibitions of bodybuilders in the context of the amusement industry were essential for exposing mass audiences to bodybuilding as a technology of the self.

⁴⁸Freak show exhibits included *born freaks*, that is people with congenital anomalies (real or fabricated); *self-made freaks*, that is people who started exhibiting themselves after intervening on their physical self through practices such as extensive tattooing, piercing etc; and *novelty acts*, that is people who were increasingly incorporated in the later stages of the freak show by putting on an unusual performance (e.g. sword-swallowers and fire-eaters) (Bogdan 1988). It is mainly in the first category that the anatomy-as-destiny framing applies.

⁴⁹As turn-of-the-century medical discourses progressively pathologized bodily difference (Canguilhem 1989), the construction of many of the human exhibits in freak shows as 'wondrous' and 'magnificent' creatures gave ground to a view of them as 'sick.' Based on this re-definition of the 'abnormal' (from 'different' to 'pathological'), many of the exhibited 'freaks' were gradually placed in the hands of scientists to be examined and cured (Bogdan 1988: 65). Concomitantly, cultural forms such as the freak show got condemned, originally in middle/upper-class circles, as vulgar and offensive, 'the pornography of disability.' Although I have not come across evidence that bodybuilders of this early period explicitly framed themselves against these particular 'abnormal' bodies, they did consistently frame the 'perfect' body as 'normal' (not in the sense of the 'average' but of the 'ideal').

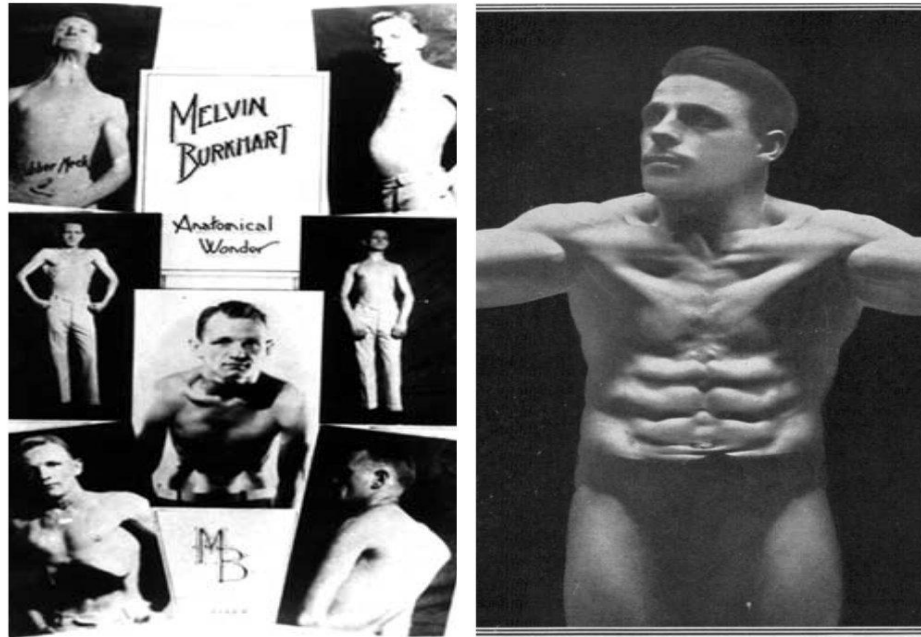


Image 5 (left): Publicity card of Melvin Burkhart (unidentified year)

A well-known physical performer of freak-/side-shows, Burkhart is featured here in his 'Anatomical Wonder' act, assuming body poses that display his anatomy and contortionist capabilities.⁵⁰

Image 6 (right): Illustration from the book *Muscle Control or Body Development by Will-Power* (1911)

The author and renowned performing bodybuilder Maxick is depicted exhibiting his 'rationally developed' muscular system and controlling his muscle groups independently. Although an exciting 'marvel' in its own right, the built body functions here as both a visual instructional tool and a spectacle of self-transformation.

⁵⁰Image source: <http://www.coneyisland.com>; ac. 23.09.2011.

Let the Comparisons Begin: First Bodybuilding Contests

The third and last section of this chapter looks at the first formally organized bodybuilding contests. Bodybuilding displays assumed the format of competition events in the last decade of the 19th century, in line with the increasing institutionalization of sports culture on both sides of the Atlantic (Kimmel 1996; Segel 1997). The dominant feature of this early period is the absence of any significant development and continuity in terms of standardized time-frames, governing bodies, and/or rules of bodybuilding competition. Although attempts can be traced towards these directions, the historical data demonstrate that events were held either on a one-off or irregular basis. Significantly, the organizing agents behind these events were individual bodybuilding entrepreneurs rather than any type of - even minimally defined- collective body.⁵¹ Although competition rules, such as judging criteria and participation eligibility, had common elements that permit for these events to be classified as bodybuilding contests,⁵² a more nuanced analysis of their specifications reveals differences in the signification and function of the spectacle. In an attempt to establish these, I have organized the discussion in this section around pivotal events of the early period in the UK and USA.

The Great Competition (UK)

Building the Image of Might: Empire and the Reformed Male Body

Organized by Eugene Sandow in London's Royal Albert Hall, September 1901, the Great Competition explicitly staged a connection between built male bodies and national strength and pride. Featuring the physical body as a fundamental unit of and metaphor for social organization, early bodybuilding discourses often imagined the modern nation as a soma: endangered as well as perfectible (Budd

⁵¹With respect to the American context, which is the main focus of the thesis, this state of things remained up until 1939, when bodybuilding competitions came under the auspices of the largest national sports body, the Amateur Athletic Union (henceforth the AAU). In the European context, the first attempts at systematization emerge in 1931 and 1934 with the introduction of regular national events, Mr. Britain and Mr. France respectively.

⁵²Bodybuilding contests were until much later (1960s) often called 'physique contests.' As discussed earlier on, the very term 'physique' entails a view of the body in its capacity as a site for cultivation and development.

1997: 22), it had to both be and look powerful in the face of 'international competition,' including the peace-time imperatives of productivity and prosperity as well as armed conflict.⁵³ In the broader context of a contemporary biopolitics of the population (Foucault 1978), bodybuilders of the early period advocated the inclusion of physical culture in schools as a foundation for the health and efficiency of the nation (Scott 2008: 86). Sandow in particular also campaigned for the adoption of his system in the physical education of military academies, and, like other physical culture entrepreneurs, often marketed his products by emphasizing their benefits for those already enlisted or planning to (Chapman 1994; Scott 2008).

The very space and moment of the Great Competition are significant: the Royal Albert Hall, a symbol of imperial power, had previously served not only for art and science exhibitions and performances but also as a venue for the spectacle of military strength and physical training. In the midst of the Boer War, concerns about Britain's 'performance' in a time of conflict for new territories as well as 'protection' of old ones were informing public debates. Statistics conducted for army recruits were deemed devastating as the majority of them had to be turned away due to poor physical condition (Budd 1997: 15; Chapman 1994: 44-45). In this context, the promotion of physical culture methods can be seen as part of a larger and highly visible discourse that, in its focus on and concern over this national body, regularly relied on technologies such as statistics for an 'objective,' 'scientific' representation of its 'truth,' its capabilities and weaknesses.

The official signification of the Great Competition was not singular. Alongside the emphasis on national preparedness and a corresponding framing of physical culture as a 'cause,' the show was publicized as aiming to "afford encouragement to those who are anxious to perfect their physiques" (*Sandow's Magazine of Physical Culture*, July 1898: 79). The contest, thus, is rendered meaningful in light of anxieties over lackluster masculinity that bodybuilding entrepreneurs had helped produce as much as they sought to 'address.' The first of its kind, the event was precisely set up as a public arena for the demonstration of a masculinity that needs to be constantly labored over and proved (Kimmel 1996). The underlying logic of this model of the male self, that is the measuring of one's masculinity against an ideal one constantly strives to reach as well as against the

⁵³The connection between powerful bodies and nationalist imperatives had a precedent in organized gymnastic movements of the second half of the 19th century, such as the German Turnverein and the Czech Sokol (Chapman 1994; Segel 1997).

masculinity of other men, acquires in such an event concrete form. Exposed to the eyes of a judging panel of 'experts' and to those of their fellow contestants, men displayed their bodies to show who they 'really' were.

Giving Form to a New Type of Spectacle

In terms of a historical trajectory of bodybuilding competition, the Great Competition becomes important in its capacity as the first event to bear significant elements of organization. Following a model of more established sport structures, a precise qualification system and rules of competition were put in place. Over a period of three years, a series of local contests at regional (county) level qualified the first three winners of each to the final event; even though eligibility was limited to pupils of the Sandow training system, effectively rendering the whole enterprise an advertising technology for the entrepreneur's various ventures, the process in itself constituted for the first time a formal, nation-wide basis for participation.

Formal judging criteria for the evaluation and comparison of contestants were devised, and their strict and objective implementation was insisted upon.⁵⁴ The picture of organized competition was complete with financial and symbolic rewards for participants. The top-three contestants, in particular, received prize money, statuettes of Sandow in gold, silver and bronze, and publicity on a national scale in *Sandow's Magazine of Physical Culture*, a physical culture, bodybuilding, and sports publication which was one among the varied ventures of the entrepreneur. As in the case of the competitions I will discuss further down, bodybuilding media emerge at this stage as a critical cog in an integrated mechanics giving form and generating interest for the spectacles and the commercial interests these represented.⁵⁵

The particularity of the event lay not only in the unprecedented level of organization, but also in its combination of two fundamentals: formalizing bodybuilding competition and at the same time rendering the bodybuilding show the

⁵⁴Building a profile of 'seriousness' and organization, the promoter of the contest personally oversaw the preliminaries in order to ensure fairness (*Sandow's Magazine of Physical Culture*, July-December 1899: 77) and operated as a referee in case of disagreement between the two primary judges of the final event.

⁵⁵The inaugural announcement was made in the very first issue of the magazine (*Sandow's Magazine of Physical Culture*, July 1898: 79) and overall coverage continued up until the reporting after the final event.

pinnacle of the event. In this, a break was instituted with earlier formats for the display of the built body where it was positioned as merely one amongst other segments of an event, typically taking place after the more established spectacle of strength in the format of music hall/vaudeville strongmen acts or weight-lifting contests;⁵⁶ most importantly, this was the first formal attempt at bringing many built bodies on the same stage to be compared to each other.

Appreciating the 'Good' Body

According to *Sandow's Magazine of Physical Culture* (January-June 1901: 280), which functioned as the official voice for the contest, "[t]he Great Competition [...] was arranged with a view to discover the most perfectly developed man in the country." In an attempt to give form to a new type of spectacle that was being constituted through that very process, a list of specific qualities of the 'good' body were published. These seem in line with the holistic model of health and development that marks bodybuilding culture in this early period: first, there was general development; second, equality or balance of development; third, the condition and tone of the tissues; fourth, general health; and fifth, the condition of the skin (*Sandow's Magazine of Physical Culture*, July-December 1900: 398, cited in Chapman 1994: 130-131).

The evaluation process, an equally central aspect in the constitution of this new cultural form, can also be seen as a reflection of the early dominant model of bodybuilding. The analytical reporting on the show represented the judging as follows:

There were many keen professional eyes watching the two judges as they laboriously selected the men who were to compete in the final, but every selection seemed to win approval, and there can be no question but that their decisions were popular. [...] The final judging occupied a long time, and it was a marvel that the house did not lose its patience. [...] Mr. Sandow fairly went on his hands and knees to examine the nether limbs of the men, and not a point seemed to escape the judges, the audience watching with breathless interest.

(*Sandow's Magazine of Physical Culture*, July-December 1901: 291)

⁵⁶In both UK and the USA, informal bodybuilding exhibitions, some bearing elements of competition, were sporadically held since the 1890s at the conclusion of weightlifting meets (Chapman 1994: 130; Fair 2003: 10).

Representations such as this downplayed the inevitable element of subjectivity in evaluations of the 'good' body, emphasizing instead their 'scientific' character. The judging criteria, their methodical implementation, and even the selection of judges - the classically-trained sculptor Sir Charles Lawes and the medically-trained author Conan Doyle - all coalesce into a picture of 'objective' judgments. The 'set' body ideals that appear to have been the basis for such a procedure were in effect being assembled in the process by early bodybuilders through their interpretations of canons of science and art as well as their own models of 'health' and 'normality.'

The 'nature' of the spectacle at the Great Competition was discursively constructed through the reporting on audience's reactions, too. A combination of an 'elevated' discourse of seriousness with one of amusement appears at play here. On the one hand, the audience was said to relate to the spectacle on the basis of critical attention and learned appreciation; on the other hand, emphasis on excitement and an enthusiastic, communal response on the part of spectators produced the display in the language of the popular entertainment industry. This double framing seems adjusted to both the 'high' profiling of the built body, concurrent with the taste and standards of a dominant 'respectable' culture and its representatives; as well as the built body's entry into an amusement business paradigm targeting mass audiences in search of value for money.⁵⁷

The Physical Culture Shows (USA)

Sport Competition and Male Beauty Pageant

Inaugurated in 1903 and held only for a few years, the Physical Culture Shows can be seen as the first bodybuilding contests in (North-)American soil. Although I have not come across any relevant direct evidence, it appears to me as quite plausible that the Great Competition was the entrepreneurial inspiration for the Physical Culture Shows. Held at the Madison Square Garden in NYC, the Physical Cultural Shows were organized by the primary promoter of physical culture in the

⁵⁷It is in the context of this show-business paradigm that one can think the framing of the event's popularity - as indicated by the reported numbers of those who managed or tried to attend - as a claim to legitimacy in its own right. The report spoke not only of the Royal Albert Hall as packed to maximum capacity, but also of central London as completely jammed prior and after the event (*Sandow's Magazine of Physical Culture*, July-December 1901: 286).

US and publisher of a series of specialized magazines and books, Bernarr Macfadden. Including a multitude of athletic performances, some of which featuring record-holders and champions in their respective fields, the 1903 event was promoted as a sports extravaganza:

A new epoch in sport is promised by the Physical Culture Exhibition Company at the Madison Square Garden this week, beginning to-day, and the programme comprises almost every form of competitive exercises, in which leading performers in their various lines will demonstrate their prowess. There will be fencing by women, racing and jumping contests by girls and women; wrestling, physical culture style, for a \$500 prize; running and jumping races by boys; three days' fasting go-as-you-please race, for which seventy men have entered, and a number of Amateur Athletic Union events.

(*The New York Times*, December 28th, 1903)

The bodybuilding contest at the heart of the event was titled 'Best and Most Perfectly Developed Man and Woman.'⁵⁸ Procedures were formalized regarding eligibility, participation, and evaluation: entrants had to meet certain physical and age requirements,⁵⁹ and be subscribers to *Physical Culture*, the flag publication of the event's promoter; finalists were chosen from hundreds of photographic entries submitted to the magazine, while preliminaries for the contest were held both in the USA and the UK. Consistent with an early bodybuilding model celebrating 'all-around perfection' and 'normality,' the contest guidelines stipulated that:

...this competition is not to decide who is the most wonderfully developed man, as we do not desire to select abnormal representatives or freaks from the standpoint of development; we wish the prize to be awarded to the most perfect specimen of physical manhood.

(contest promotional brochure, cited in Chapman 1994:135)

⁵⁸The title for the following year's (1904) bodybuilding contest at the Physical Culture Show was changed to 'The Most Perfectly Developed Man in the World.' The titles themselves suggest an aspiration for expanding the reach of bodybuilding on a national and international basis, even if this was primarily symbolic rather than actually corresponding to such an extended basis of practitioners/competitors.

⁵⁹Such as being at least five feet, four inches in height, between 20-50 years-old.

Competitors were evaluated by a judging panel of 'experts' from the fields of art, medicine, and corporeal reform. Sculptors, physicians and physical culturists examined the built bodies for their degree of "uniform, healthy and wholesome development of each and every limb and muscle, and the relative proportions that they bear to each other" (Fair 2003: 9-10).⁶⁰ The next physique contest promoted by Bernarr Macfadden almost two decades later, entitled 'The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man' (1921),⁶¹ was still marked by the discourse of 'objective' perfection. As historian John Fair contends, "again it was health and overall development, not muscularity, that was critical. [According to the contest's winner, Charles Atlas] a panel of sculptors, illustrators and doctors examined each of the contestants, 'extremely carefully' for five nights. 'Eyes, ears, nose, throat, heart, lungs, and blood were carefully recorded.' Atlas also pointed that some of the 75 contestants had bigger arms or legs than he did, but none had his overall symmetry" (ibid).

The emphasis on 'health' and 'natural perfection' that marks these events needs to be appreciated not only in light of a holistic model of bodybuilding in both the USA and Europe, but also of the pronounced personal stance of the contest promoter: a key figure in early physical and bodybuilding culture, Bernarr Macfadden personified those tendencies that opposed not only industrial civilization but also much of the orthodox medical establishment which they identified as part of the 'disorder' of modern life. From this standpoint, the 'perfect' body's constitutive Other were the bodies of those occupying Western metropolitan centers, degenerating due to poor hygiene, processed-food diets, sedentary lifestyles, and modern medicine's drugs and vaccines.⁶²

⁶⁰The winner was awarded with \$1000 and later on filmed by Edison.

⁶¹As in the previous contests, both symbolic and financial rewards were put in place for the winner (a monetary award of \$1000 and a diploma). In 1922 the contest's name was changed to 'America's Most Perfectly Developed Man.'

⁶²Himself of very modest background and a prototype of the 'self-made' man, Macfadden can be viewed alongside other reformers of similar origins for whom their attacks of the orthodox medical establishment were not only a way to form a new field of health expertise but also to express an antagonism towards more educated and socially established classes of health experts (Hau 2003). At the same time, their disapproval of various 'health-degenerating' practices, such as poor hygiene or excessive alcohol intake, may not necessarily entail a bias towards the populations most associated with them. In any case, like most early physical culturists and bodybuilders, Macfadden framed his admonitions in a language of self-improvement, framing his model of health as the most important form of 'thrift' one can have (*Muscle Builder*, October 1924: 6).

For the other 1921 contest organized by the same promoter, and won again by his employee Charles Atlas, male beauty was the primary signification. Although very similar to those of the earlier shows, the specifications for 'the World's Most Handsome Man' contest placed emphasis on both face and body. Here, the bodybuilding contest was framed as a male counterpart for the female beauty pageant it was held in conjunction with. The analytical description of the judging criteria in *Physical Culture* magazine included the following:

...our two prize contests for the most handsome man and the most beautiful woman are to be determined by the equal consideration of the facial appearance and of the bodily form and development. The artistic perfection and beauty of the face will be judged by a single portrait photograph. The body will be judged both from photographs and measurements [...]

In the present competition the face counts one half. Moreover, the judges will consider the body photographs and measurements on the grounds of symmetry and beauty and not merely on the extent of muscular development. This will not rule out the athlete or the gymnast but it will permit the man who is of slighter build to compete on equal terms with the more Herculean specimen of manhood.

(*Physical Culture*, February 1921: 32)

This description of the formal criteria was accompanied by an entry form including a sketch of the human body for the applicant to fill out the detailed measurements for their various body parts, literally from head to toe. Although there is no overt mention to any specific model the judges would use in appraising contestants, the assumption seems to be that the evaluation process was based on 'objective' criteria.

The other significant message I read in the explication of the aesthetic criteria is the target participants and audience for the event. The organizers' emphasis was not on an 'elite' of those (semi-)professionally involved in physical culture ('athletes,' 'gymnasts', referred to in aesthetic terms as 'Herculean specimens of manhood') but on encouraging participation among an extended basis of 'lay' practitioners ('the man who is of slighter build'). Their aim was in fact stated quite clearly: "This contest is logically open to a larger group of men than one decided on a basis of mere bodily development" (ibid.). Thus, rather than narrowing down the pool of participants and possibly audiences, the promotion of this contest seems to have aimed at opening up a space to the 'general' public as both potential participant and spectator. It is in this sense, too, that the contest forms part of a larger market in male beauty and celebrity

that the promoter of the event helped expand in both his specialized bodybuilding publications as well as the more general-content ones featuring 'show-biz' figures familiar to wider audiences.⁶³

Champions and/as Ordinary Practitioners: (Non-)Stratification in Early Bodybuilding Culture

In the early period explored in this chapter, the bodies of distinguished bodybuilders are neither in reality nor in discourse radically different from those of ordinary practitioners. Although the former come to hold a certain status in the world of physical culture, they seem to me to have been perceived as 'best among equals,' in the sense of not belonging to an environment of their own. At the level of embodied practice, this is reflected in the fact that no body of expert knowledge and specialized technologies designed for 'elite' bodybuilding appears to exist. In addition, I have not found any data suggesting that bodybuilders in either the UK or the USA instrumentally shaped their bodies *in preparation for* their displays of muscular development, either solo or in competition. Neither is there a discourse of a genetic hierarchy framing distinguished bodybuilders as 'naturally predisposed' to excel in this domain. On the contrary, genetics were methodically produced by key figures in the bodybuilding culture of this period as irrelevant in the pursuit of ongoing self-transformation, largely in an attempt to magnify the commercial appeal of their own methods.

In their writings on training methods, early physical culturists and bodybuilders seem to equally address ordinary practitioners (or even the general public as a target population) as well as advanced athletes in various sporting activities. As far as the latter category goes, regular references are made to those participating in formal weight-lifting, wrestling, and/or gymnastic competitions, evidencing the existence of frameworks for dedicated, and in some cases professional or semi-professional, elite practice and performance in these domains. What is noteworthy for the purpose of this discussion is that there exist no similar

⁶³The prize for the 'The World's Most Handsome Man' contest was "a satisfactory contract for motion picture work or of \$1000 cash" (*Physical Culture* magazine, February 1921: 32). *Physical Culture* magazine had regular pictorial sections entitled 'The Body Beautiful,' while Macfadden was the publisher of cinema star Rudolph Valentino's 1923 book *How You Can Keep Fit*.

references to a bodybuilding 'elite.' As shown, the early period is characterized by sporadic occurrences rather than any regularized, dedicated structures for competition bodybuilding. Importantly, muscular development, although increasingly appreciated and framed as a spectacle, was primarily signified as a welcomed derivative of and crucial factor for 'perfect health' and/or athletic performance. The appearance of the body, thus, was read as a manifestation of ability and, more broadly, well-being.

This non-stratification inside bodybuilding culture is, I argue, emblematic of the dominant paradigm of this early period. The non-existence of dedicated structures, practices, and discourses making possible and reproducing an 'elite' demonstrate that, unlike other physical attributes pursued in the context of various organized sports, muscular development was not conceived as a site for specialized performance in itself but rather an integrated aspect of a holistic health model. This also makes sense in terms of an aesthetic model of the human body which, having at its core a notion of 'perfection' as return to a set ideal, sets tangible, 'objective' criteria for, and by extension limitations to, development.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed central aspects of the early period of organized bodybuilding culture in the UK and the USA. As a compass for my exploration I have focused on the various types of bodybuilding displays that emerge for the first time during this period. In trying to understand their place in contemporary cultural hierarchies, I have found displays of the 'perfect' built body to be situated in and share elements with both 'high' and 'low' cultural spaces and forms, as well as developing their own conventions of representation and hierarchies. Organized bodybuilding competition, in particular, gets articulated as a distinct form for the first time.

Looking at the various contexts, what becomes evident is the tentative and exploratory nature of early bodybuilding displays, and the multiplicity of discourses bodybuilders drew upon to provide them with meaning: art, science, nation, self-reform, and male beauty are the most prominent ones. Out of this array of available framings of the built body, some were prioritised depending on venue and occasion. At the same time, I have identified certain constants regarding organization,

evaluations of the 'good' body, and function of the spectacle, which reflect the gradual emergence of a common *modus operandi* for bodybuilding displays across the Atlantic. Integral to this is the synergy between individual entrepreneurs, training spaces, live spectacles, publications, and networks for distributing images, models of embodied practice, and technologies of the built body that often cut across national borders.

Thinking the displays of the 'perfect' built body has allowed me to identify the dominant model in early bodybuilding culture. That is a restorative model that, in its celebration of the 'natural' and 'normal' body, produced 'perfection' as a return to a 'objective,' golden standard. Configured in holistic terms, this early model emphasized health, 'all-around' development, and moderation. An essential aspect of it is a reading of the body's appearance as an 'organic' expression of its inner state: muscular development and beauty were, thus, interpreted as reflections of well-being and ability. Displays of the built body allowed bodybuilders to visualize their models of 'health' and 'normality,' and, most importantly, introduce different audiences to their commercially available services and products of physical transformation.

In sketching this model I have looked at the various Other bodies against which the 'perfect' built body was directly or indirectly defined. Although they embody different types/levels of Other-ness, some amongst them seem to recur as more visibly constitutive of the 'perfect' body than others. In the discourses I have examined, the sickly, weak, malnourished, drug-ridden bodies of industrialized societies and their urban centres are the first in significance. Others appear much closer in cultural space to the 'perfect' built body, such as the strong/muscular body that was developed asymmetrically and/or excessively, or the bodies of elite sport that were overstrained and only partially developed.

In the process of my discussion, I have looked at the ways that turn-of-the-century bodybuilders related to culturally dominant discourses, references, and symbols, and the uses they made of them. The full picture, which I only began to sketch here, would necessitate looking at the intersection between critical periods and moments, hegemonic culture, bodybuilders' own backgrounds, and how what they produced was received by the various social groups they were able to reach. The very currency of those discourses that seem to shape early bodybuilding culture, such as science, neoclassicism, self-improvement, and de-/regeneration, problematizes a straightforward and uniform reading of them by, firstly, rendering them open to various interpretations. For example, bodybuilders, in their majority of lower-middle

and working-class backgrounds, saw in classical art both a revered cultural origin for the cult of the body they propagated, and a hierarchy of physicality that helped them paint a model of self-improvement and distinction based on their primary resource, i.e. their bodies and their disciplining of them (Hau 2003).⁶⁴ Secondly, the popularization of these hegemonic discourses allowed for various instrumental and situational uses that did not necessarily entail any 'deeper' commitment (Bailey 1998). Thus, in a public sphere defined in direct or indirect ways by middle-class standards of 'culture' and 'public morality,' bodybuilders used the imagery and language of science and art to portray the spectacle of the built body as both 'useful' and 'proper.' In addition, the 'respectability' with which these core discourses were vested rendered them a 'safe(r) bet' for bodybuilders as a newly emerging class of self-designated 'experts' for whom cultural recognition and acceptance was not a given but something they had to strive for, often in relation, cooperative or antagonistic, to more established fields of expertise. Even in the narrower terms of promoting their various business enterprises in an expanding capitalist economy crossing national borders, they could rely on popularized and increasingly standardized references and symbols to pave their way to wider market appeal.

The next chapter on what I have identified as the middle period of organized bodybuilding culture (1940s-1970s) shifts the focus of the discussion to the USA context that, in the course of this time span, emerges as the dominant centre of a global paradigm. The discussion is structured around a juxtaposition between two different models of bodybuilding and the organizations and interests they represented. Focusing on two seminal contests, the Mr. America, run by the AAU, and the Mr. Olympia, run by the IFBB, I show how a post-war model of 'ideal manhood,' 'uprightness,' functional fitness, and amateur competition was overtaken in the 1970s by one that embraced professional competition, an emphasis on muscular development in its own right, and a technologically-enabled aesthetic of unlimited growth whereby 'perfection' is not any more imagined as a return to a set, 'objective' ideal but as an open-ended project.

⁶⁴Writing of the German context of the same period, Hau (2003: 199-200) points out to the different interpretations of the 'same' dominant discourse by social groups with diametrically opposite objectives:

Although regular physicians and life reformers, educated and lower-middle-class people, and feminists and antifeminists often used the same neoclassical icons in order to represent ideals of human health and beauty, they conveyed different messages through the various ways in which they propagated physical culture and a healthy lifestyle.

Chapter 5

From 'Ideal Manhood' to 'Muscle For Muscle's Sake:'

Shift of Paradigm in the Middle Period (1940s-1970s)

Introduction

The present chapter explores developments in organised bodybuilding culture in what I term the middle period, from the 1940s to the 1970s. This is a period marked, firstly, by the emergence for the first time of national and international structures and governing bodies for bodybuilding competition: these were either purpose-built organizations, i.e. created precisely in order to govern competition bodybuilding, such as the International Federation of Body Builders (henceforth the IFBB) in the US, and the National Amateur Bodybuilders' Association (henceforth NABBA) in the UK, or already existing sports bodies that undertook the governance of bodybuilding contests, such as the Amateur Athletic Union (henceforth the AAU) in the USA; secondly, by escalating competition and the development of different factions and interests within organized bodybuilding culture. Although comparative references are made to the European context, I have chosen to focus on the USA as it becomes during the course of these decades the focal point of bodybuilding culture with an increasingly global influence.

Debates about the 'proper' meaning of bodybuilding, typically inscribed in the various systems of aesthetic criteria and rules of competition, often involved in indirect or direct ways claims over institutional power in an expanding field of social and economic activity. In an attempt to illustrate the antagonisms characteristic of this time, and the progressive consolidation of a shift in the dominant model of organised bodybuilding culture, I have chosen to focus on two prominent contests and the organizations that promoted them: the Mr. America, sanctioned by the AAU, and the Mr. Olympia, sanctioned by the IFBB. As I will demonstrate, these pivotal events functioned as flagships for the respective governing bodies, reflecting and (re)producing the antagonistic models of physical culture and bodybuilding put forth by each. In researching them, I have greatly relied on the publications that were closely associated with them or represented similar viewpoints (*Strength&Health* and *IronMan* magazines for the former,

Muscle Builder magazine for the latter), and which I have used as sources of both factual information and dominant discourses that I analyse.

More specifically, the first part of the chapter examines the Mr. America contest and its search of 'ideal manhood' that is rendered meaningful in a post-war climate of strict heteronormativity and the connection of physical culture with 'proper' citizenship and the overt ideological framework of role-modelling for the nation's youth. The celebration of 'upright,' 'wholesome' masculinity by the dominant order of the AAU is partly constituted through its juxtaposition to an 'unmanly' Other that pursues muscular development for its own sake and engages in a 'narcissistic' preoccupation with one's looks. At the same, I try to show how the rapid expansion of bodybuilding into a profitable corporate industry shaped how key players practically embraced it, even if they retained their 'ideological' reservations about it.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the competing model represented in the Mr. Olympia contest and its logic of 'muscle for muscle's sake.' This new culture that legitimated the pursuit of bodybuilding for its own sake rested on a certain reconfiguring of dominant masculinity, whereby taking care of oneself and cultivating one's body were produced as heterosexual, 'proper, and 'cool.' I then move on to explore the introduction of professional competition that figures as the crystallization of this new paradigm of 'pure' bodybuilding, and some of what I perceive to be its most important ramifications. These include a further legitimating of the 'new' masculinity through notions of effort, fierce competition, and a career in bodybuilding; the production of a learned gaze and the prioritizing of bodybuilding's 'own' tradition and standards of excellence; a direction along the culturally-privileged notions of specialization of performance, progress, and efficiency; and an overall aesthetic of growth and expansion that becomes dominant and gets exported internationally.

The Mr. America Contest: In Search of 'Ideal Manhood'

The Mr. America has been one of the most widely recognizable and long-standing bodybuilding contests worldwide.⁶⁵ Instituted in 1939 and run for 60

⁶⁵Evidence of the contest's prestige were the attempts of competing organisations to appropriate some of it by producing their own Mr. America contests. Unless otherwise specified, the Mr. America I discuss is the 'original' one, sanctioned by and closely tied in all respects to the AAU.

years, it was closely associated with the AAU and its model of bodybuilding based on an ideal of 'all-around' development. Like the popular Miss America in search of the perfect specimen of womanhood, the Mr. America contest's objective was to showcase an 'ideal representation of American manhood' in every respect: physically, morally, and mentally. As phrased in the following editorial of *Iron Man* magazine, a leading publication of the time, "WE ARE ALL AGREED THAT WE MUST EITHER HAVE A MR. AMERICA WHO WILL BE AN IDEAL AMERICAN IN EVERY WAY or change the name to something like 'Best Built Man' or some other less inclusive title" (*IronMan*, September 1954: 42, cited in Fair 2003: 16, emphasis in original). The overt emphasis placed on the grand ideological framework of the nation's youth, health, strength and moral uprightness is situated in a post-World War II climate where physical preparedness becomes a central concern and index of patriotism.

The criteria for evaluating the 'good' body seem in certain ways in line with the early holistic model I have explored in the previous chapter. In his discussion of the second 1940 Mr. America contest held at Madison Square Garden, John Fair points out that "more emphasis was placed on muscular development, as signified in points and in the separate recognition of a most muscular man, but symmetry, posing and general appearance were nearly as important as in Macfadden's early Physical Culture shows" (Fair 2003: 12-13). Muscular development, an aesthetic attribute, was still considered a derivative of more fundamental qualities, such as strength and health (ibid).⁶⁶ Given the framing of the contest as in search of the ideal representative of American manhood, a series of new criteria were added. Thus, the decision was made by the governing body in 1955 to "gradually adopt such criteria as character, education, career aspirations, and athletic ability in a 'rather informal way' through an interview process" (ibid: 17). Significantly, athletic ability was introduced in 1956 as a formal criterion for the overall title. In the seminal article 'Judging a Physique Contest,' Bob Hoffman, head of the AAU committee for weightlifting and bodybuilding, stipulated:

⁶⁶The discontinuation in 1957 of awards for individual body-parts, such as 'best arms' (*Strength & Health*, May 1957: 59), which by definition focus on compartmentalised development can also be interpreted as a reflection of a model emphasizing all-around development.

In selecting Mr. America, or any other Mr. Titlist, there should be an endeavour to select the best all-around man, a man who will be a credit to the title he bears, not just the most muscular, as too often has been done in some quarters. In selecting the title winner, whether Mr. America, Mr. Pennsylvania, Mr. New York City, or whatever the title being contested is called, the following system of scoring is employed: 5 Points for Symmetry of Proportions. 5 Points for Muscular Development. 5 Points for General Appearance, Skin, Hair, Posture, etc. 5 points for Athletic Ability.⁶⁷

(Strength & Health, May 1957: 60)

In the detailed explication of each of the criteria of this judging system, the link was consistently made to the overall ideal bodybuilding champions were expected to meet, that is a development of the whole person. With respect to athletic ability, the following case is made:

The fairest, simplest and surest way to measure a man's athletic ability is to ascertain his ability with the three lifts, practised the world over. The two-hand press, the two-hands snatch, the two-hands clean and jerk [all standardised movements in weightlifting competition]. A man who is a good performer with the three Olympic lifts will have developed physical ability which will permit him to perform well in a wide variety of athletic contests. He will have built super-strength, superior health, a well-balanced physique, and the expectancy of a long, happy, successful and useful life.

(ibid)

It is particularly in the criterion of 'general appearance' that the model of (competition) bodybuilding embraced by the dominant players of the time was laid out in its different dimensions. Here, the heterosexually coded surfaces of the body were but an aspect in the constitution of ideal manhood. The champion bodybuilder was defined by his position in social context, his visibility and distinction rendered meaningful on the basis of culturally-privileged discourses such as role-modelling for the youth. Breaking down the evaluation process

⁶⁷In 1966 the value of athletic points was lessened and in 1969 abolished. This timing seems concurrent with the onset of 'pure' bodybuilding competitions that I will be discussing further down.

regarding 'general appearance,' the head of the AAU weightlifting and bodybuilding committee continues:

Judging in this class must include in addition to general appearance, skin and hair, also teeth, posture, carriage as the platform is approached and left, posing and many other features almost too numerous to mention. The winner must be a good looking man, handsome in a manly sort of way. Features such as big ears, buck teeth, small chin, lined face, skin irregularities, shortage of hair or bald spots, varicose veins, stretch marks, flat feet, are retarding factors in judging in this department. There are many intangibles which must be included in the selection of the man most worthy to bear the title *Mr. America* or any lesser title which is being contested. Morality must be given consideration, for we must select a wholesome type of man. Education is important, for Mr. America must be able to speak well as he will frequently appear on radio and television shows, and will speak before groups of people, at schools, Boys' clubs, colleges, YMCAs, Service and Sports groups. He must be patient, for he will have to answer innumerable questions, particularly from the young enthusiasts. He must sign autographs endlessly without becoming impatient. He must be a live, alert, friendly man, must possess a combination of human qualities, which will make us proud to call him Mr. America.

(ibid)



Image 7 *Strength & Health* magazine cover, February 1958⁶⁸

Featured amongst his 'all-American' family is John Grimek, multiple winner of the Mr. America contest, Olympic weigh-lifting champion with the USA team, and editor of *Muscular Development* magazine. He epitomized the model of physical culture and masculinity celebrated by the AAU dominant order, combining athletic ability and 'character' with a body aesthetic often described in the culture as 'rugged.'

Another central feature of the model of elite bodybuilding supported by dominant players in this period is the ethos of amateur sport competition. In its capacity as the largest amateur sport organization in the US, operating since 1888, the AAU insisted on the amateur character of competition, considering bodybuilders who made any money from their bodies as professionals. The seriousness with which the amateur ethos was upheld is evident in the various sanctions that were in place for those bodybuilders who participated in events that were deemed to be non-amateur. In some respects, this amateur, non-profit profile at an institutional level seems concurrent with the dominant meaning the

⁶⁸Image source: <http://musclememory.com/magCovers/sh/sh5802.jpg>; ac. 30.06.2011.

embodied practice and organized display of bodybuilding were vested: a 'high-minded' enterprise geared towards serving society and providing role-models of 'wholesomeness.' John Fair (1999, 2006) has shown how in this emphasis on the amateur character of bodybuilding competition, the AAU was a significant part of an international alliance. NABBA, the governing body for bodybuilding competition in the UK, was a key partner in this respect well into the 1970s.

Sport or Beauty Pageant? The Precarious Place of Bodybuilding inside the Dominant Order

Even though growing in popularity, bodybuilding as embodied practice and formalised spectacle occupied a precarious place inside the dominant culture of the 40s, 50s, and 60s. This is apparent in both how bodybuilding was discursively produced in the specialized media, as well as in the institutional arrangements of the time. Despite being the most extensive and powerful sports federation in the whole of the US, the AAU had for decades no separate governing bodies for bodybuilding and weightlifting. Only a single Weightlifting and Bodybuilding Committee existed. Writing of the 1940s and 1950s, John Fair argues that "bodybuilding could not be pursued as a sport for its own sake since there was virtually no frame of reference for it within the AAU structure that governed competitive weightlifting" (Fair 2003: 10). As late as 1964, suggestions for the creation of separate governance for bodybuilding were not even dealt with seriously. Reflective of this hierarchy of importance was the fact that for the most part bodybuilding contests were typically held as adjunct shows to the more culturally legitimate and recognized weight-lifting competitions.

One of the main reasons for this seems to be the reluctance on the part of AAU officialdom to fully embrace bodybuilding as an activity equally legitimate as weightlifting. Although the latter was fully supported and celebrated, representing the US in international sport competition such as the Olympic Games, the former was seen by key figures in the organization as rather dubious and effete when pursued 'for its own sake.' Disparaging comments from authoritative figures of the status quo were often voiced in public fora, effectively delineating 'proper' and 'improper' approaches to the embodied practice and communities forming around them:

A *boobybuilder* is usually a young man who has nothing better to do with his time than to spend four or five hours a day in a smelly gym doing bench presses and curls and squats and lat pulley exercises. He usually wears his hair long and frequently gilds the lily by having it waved. He is supremely concerned with big lats, big pex, big traps, big delts, and flapping triceps [names for individual muscle groups] [...]
He lives for his big moment, when he can strut and posture under the glare of a spot light before an audience of several hundred followers of his peculiar cult. Athletic fitness and muscular coordination and superb health are completely meaningless to him.

(*Strength & Health*, February 1955: 49, cited in Fair 1999: 169)

From the standpoint of a 'traditional,' 'upright' masculinity that informed a hegemonic heteronormative paradigm in post-war USA, a preoccupation with one's 'look' and an assumed corresponding neglect of the 'fundamentals' of health and athletic ability was framed as 'unmanly,' not only 'improper' but 'wasteful,' too. The problematic status of bodybuilding in this period often manifested itself in public debates over the proper definition of competition bodybuilding: is it a legitimate sport or merely a male beauty pageant? The following extensive editorial from *IronMan* magazine entitled 'Is the Mr. America Contest an Athletic Event?' highlights some core assumptions in dominant bodybuilding culture of the time. The cultivation of one's body as an aesthetic object gets contrasted unfavourably to a more legitimate approach prioritizing strength and ability. Interestingly, what transpires from this discourse is a dominant standpoint that does not recognise the logic of self-referentiality as legitimately applicable to bodybuilding. Rather, pursuing muscular development 'for its own sake' is understood as a peculiar form of gender dysfunction spoken in the stigmatizing terms of 'vanity' and 'narcissism:'

I do not disapprove of physique contests. I do think, however, that there are too many of them for the good of the game or for the good of the participants. I feel that a few such contests each year would be sufficient. Area contests, Jr. and Sr. Mr. America contests should be sufficient. Any more than this tends to place too much emphasis on narcissism or, as the dictionary says, "self-love; excessive interest in one's appearance, comfort, importance." Vanity becomes the driving force in the lives of some of these fellows. What real value has a 19 or 20-inch arm or the most beautiful physique in the world? Seemingly a man with a 20-inch arm should be extremely strong but we see featherweights and lightweights who have 14 or 15-inch arms who are stronger.
There should be some other incentive for winning a physique title than just

the title. There should be some other objective than this. It has never been proven that a man with a 20-inch arm is any healthier than a man with a 15-inch arm. Many physique men, when asked why they wish to win the Mr. America title, will reply that it is the ambition of their lives; the most wonderful thing that can happen in their lives. Truly, it is an accomplishment, but to what end? Some of them say they want to be an inspiration to youth to improve themselves physically. Improve themselves physically for what? To win a few physique contests? A Mr. America contest?

(*IronMan*, August-September 1964: 3)

In configuring competing masculinities, body ideals, practices and qualities get vested with particular meanings. Thus, notions of 'uprightness,' 'wholesomeness' and 'propriety' are encoded in the aesthetic and fitness of the 'rugged' body: manly, healthy, sturdy, able, the product of a strength-oriented training system founded on Olympic weightlifting. From the standpoint of this dominant model, the 'Adonis' ideal, associated with those who pursue bodybuilding for its own sake, is derided as 'puffy-looking' and 'inflated,' a reflection of an 'unhealthy' love of oneself. In a similar vein, the training methods used to build it get dismissed as 'sissy' in their emphasis on cultivating one's 'look' through the use of lighter weights and 'isolation' techniques rather than developing maximum strength and athletic ability.

'Lesser' Masculinity as a Continuum: The Monstrosity of Homosexuality

The 'undue preoccupation' with one's looks discussed above transpires in this period as part of a wider continuum of a 'lesser' masculinity; the 'degenerate' far-end of this continuum was homosexuality, a central anxiety in post-war US culture. Inside the world of physical culture, this uneasiness seems to have lied in the fear that an emphasis on appearance would not only avert practitioners from the 'all-around' fundamentals of strength, health and wholesomeness, but could also leave the door open for a transgressive reading of the male built body. 'Blue' or 'beefcake' magazines become central reference points in this respect. In more or less direct -if coded- ways, these publications not only circulated eroticized representations of the male built body but also functioned as a device for promoting services and networks of a sexual nature (Hooven 1995). In light of contemporary laws against 'indecent' literature, Hooven (ibid: 74) argues that "for

much of the fifties, those little physique magazines were not just an aspect of gay culture; they virtually *were* gay culture."

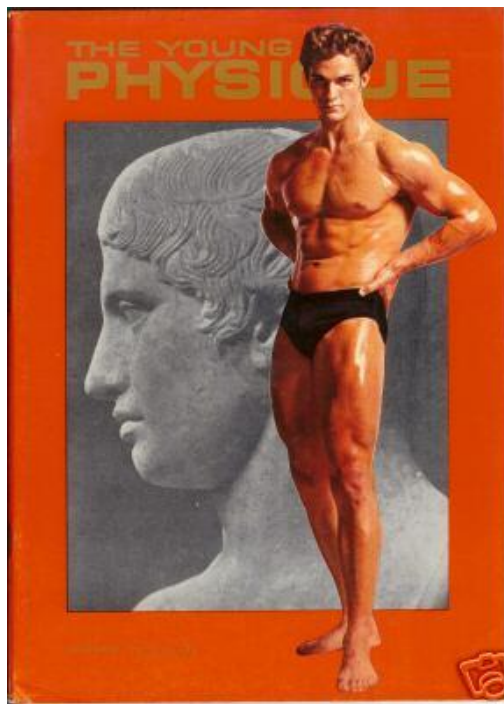


Image 8 *The Young Physique* magazine cover, Vol.5, No.2, 1963⁶⁹

The above is a typical 'blue' or 'beefcake' publication, employing classical art imagery as a veneer of respectability for eroticized representations of the male built body. Mark Gabor calls these publications 'transitional,' a particular stage in the evolution of gay culture defined by intolerance and legal persecution. He (1972: 205) describes these magazines as

ambiguously titled; references are made to the 'philosophy' of the physical culturist; the editors feel called upon to state such purposes as 'aiding the artist, sculptor, photographer, and model;' no copyright is claimed; sets of photographs are offered for sale; one or two dull, poorly illustrated articles may appear on judo or karate, evidently so the magazine can claim another 'instructional' function.

⁶⁹Image source: http://cgi.ebay.com/VINTAGE-GAY-MAGAZINE-1963-THE-YOUNG-PHYSIQUE-VOL-5-NO-2_W0QQitemZ320227645493QQihZ011QQcategoryZ280QQrdZ1QQssPageNameZWD1VQQcm dZViewItemQQ_trksidZp1638Q2em118Q2el1247#ebayphotohosting; ac. 18.04.2007.

From the standpoint of the dominant players in the field advocating a 'clean,' 'proper,' heterosexual masculinity, such publications and their representations of the male built body directly undermined the effort to establish in the public consciousness the social value of physical culture. By equating homosexuality with perversion and criminality, a type of monstrosity one needs to spectacularly distance oneself from, editors and alleged readers of the official voices 'representing' the field recognised the authority of state or state-related organizations, such as decency societies, the police, and the postal office, in their combined attempts to thwart the 'danger.'⁷⁰

The discourse on 'illegitimate' publications was overtly framed with a culturally-central vocabulary of public morality, the nation's youth, as well as 'innocent' and/or 'exploited' practitioners. A great deal of the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate representations, networks, and practices was produced in terms of the purported motivations that brought them forth. The former were framed as 'socially useful,' providing the nation's younger generations with respectable role-models and structures for clean living and self-development through sport. The latter, in contrast, were designated as lacking any sense of morality and service to society, only guided by the motivation of economic profit of the individuals orchestrating them. In the section 'Letters From Readers' of its November 1961 issue, and under the title 'Innocent Victim,' *Strength & Health* published the following complaint allegedly sent to its editor regarding the circulation of 'beefcake' magazines.

Revulsion and anger have motivated me to write this letter. I was down at the local paper store today buying the latest copy of my favorite magazine, *Strength & Health*, when I ran across a copy of Joe Weider's latest queer sheet, *Demi-Gods*. What a sickening magazine! It is possible for the male form to possess a rugged beauty that transcends the ages: take, for instance, the Laocoon, or more recently, Eugene Sandow. Both possess a beauty that can hardly be said to be homosexually inspired. But *Demi-Gods* does not deal in masculine beauty; it markets perversion. Decidedly effeminate "men" (if that's what they can be called) are pictured in poses which were formerly the right of womanhood only. "Cute" little beddy-bye invitations caption the filth. And whose picture do I find opposite of these mascara-ed beauties? Ron Lacy's [former Mr. America champion], that's whose. My opinion of Mr. Lacy dropped but fast. This is what hurts the iron game the most, when a man of renown, such as Mr. Lacy, allows his

⁷⁰Evidence of the latter was the strategy of U.S. police to track down homosexuals by monitoring through the Post Office subscriptions to muscle magazines of the time (Miller 1995: 262).

picture to be printed in some sodomite putrefaction like *Demi-Gods*.

(*Strength & Health*, November 1961: 7)

In responding to the protesting reader, the editor of *Strength & Health* magazine effectively sets out the boundaries of the legitimate field:

We agree [...] that the Weider publication *Demi-Gods* (along with its sister magazine *The Young Pysique*) sets a new low in the sordid world of the queer books. In all fairness to Ron Lacy, we would wager anything that he was unaware that photographs of him were being published in *Demi-Gods* and that he never signed a release authorizing publication of his photos in such publications. Hundreds of photos of Ron and other top bodybuilders are taken during or after contests and exhibitions by scores of photographers, and although every effort is made by promoters of AAU sanctioned contests to exclude photographers who are known to work for and submit photographs to questionable publishers, these bodybuilders have no control over the disposition and use of such photos.

(ibid)

This publicly performed 'resistance' against 'sexual deviants' in the sport of bodybuilding can be viewed as inextricable from the wider model the dominant player in the field, the AAU, was supposed to lead. One that actively forged a link between the 'properly' gendered body, morality and patriotism, an 'inside' that got constituted partly through its opposition to an 'unmanly' Other that accentuated 'looking pretty' and produced the male as passive object of an erotic gaze. Assuming the appearance of a public dialogue, discourses such as those quoted above show how 'propriety' got framed not only at the level of embodied practice, its methods and objectives, but also conventions of representing the built body as well as contexts for its display. Thus, 'proper' physical culture transpires as an integrated world of practices, meanings, networks, and institutions.

The Business Side of Convictions: Bodybuilding Turning Corporate

Debates over the meaning of bodybuilding as practice and formalised spectacle involved more than competing notions of masculinity and/or ideal taxonomies about what constitutes 'sport.' They also encapsulated attempts at

authoritatively defining and controlling bodybuilding as an expanding and increasingly profitable domain of socio-economic activity. Thus, the public debates taking place inside the culture of the time over bodybuilding's 'proper' meaning and place are in many ways part of struggles for institutional power. Continuing in the article 'Is the Mr. America Contest an Athletic Event?' Peary Rader, publisher of *IronMan* magazine, argues:

Certainly there are differences of viewpoints. The AAU considers this [the Mr. America contest] an athletic event - they *have* to consider it as such because they want to keep jurisdiction over it. If they were to admit it was not an athletic event then they would find it difficult to justify their control of it. In order to qualify it as an athletic event to a greater extent they have set up requirements of athletic ability and points are given for such ability.

(*IronMan*, August-September 1964: 4)

Insights such as this, expressed by high-ranking 'insiders' in public fora, shed light on the practical, business-minded considerations behind the morally-loaded rhetoric over the 'proper' meaning of bodybuilding. The tenacity with which these definitions of meaning were put forth, and which so far I have situated in light of a post-war heteronormative paradigm, appears in fact commensurate with the blossoming of bodybuilding as an industry of products and services from the mid-1950s onwards. The historical research I conducted for the middle period attests to a geometrically increasing production, promotion and distribution of bodybuilding technologies, including exercise equipment, training systems, and food supplements, facilitated by the expansion and standardization of mail-order business and the emergence of various outlets (e.g. health food stores, gyms). Bodybuilding historians (Fair 1999; Roach 2008) agree that, as an integral part of this nexus, bodybuilding contests and individual bodybuilders were employed as showcases for competing factions inside the organized culture and the commercial interests they represented.

In addition to their function in the mechanics identified above, bodybuilding contests also appear to have been relatively profitable as events in their own right. In my interview with head judge at the last AAU Mr. America contest and professor of Sociology John Rieger, he claimed that it was bodybuilding contests that drew in larger audiences, often effectively rendering financially viable the weightlifting meets they were usually held in conjunction

with from 1940s-1960s.⁷¹ This can be viewed as an added motivation to retain control over them even on the part of key players who otherwise had reservations about recognizing bodybuilding as an autonomous affair. This claim seems to be corroborated by expert opinions expressed at the time in the specialised media, such as the one below by Peary Rader:

There is still another and perhaps very compelling reason the A.A.U. is loathe to give up the Mr. America contest. This is the financial aspect. For years it has been believed (and apparently proven) that people will not come to weightlifting contests but that they will turn out in large numbers and pay good money to see a good physique contest. All you have to do is announce that Bill Pearl, Reg Park, Larry Scott or some of the other top men [bodybuilding competitors] will be on hand and you get a big turnout, a full house. This means the promoter can at least break even whereas if he had just a lifting contest he would most certainly lose money. [...] Invariably when physique contests are held in connection with lifting shows, people will come late, hoping the lifting will be over and they can see the physique contest.

(*IronMan*, August-September 1964: 4)

The Mr. Olympia Contest: In Search of 'Muscle for Muscle's Sake'

When Alexander the Great at the age of 33 conquered the then-known world, he cried: "I have no new worlds to conquer!" The same applies to Larry Scott at 24 ... Harold Poole at 20 ... as well as Bill Pearl, Reg Park, Chuck Sipes and other greats. These men have already won the great physique titles ... the **MR. AMERICA** ... the **MR. WORLD** ... the **MR. UNIVERSE**. They have no "new worlds" to conquer ... they have won the great titles and in doing so have become ineligible to compete for the same titles again. [...] it is unfortunate that it causes many champions to take layoffs and lose and not improve muscularity. The incentive is gone - the titles, the trophies, the glamour - and so the champions too often "retire" [...] We need these champions...we want them to train harder - for

⁷¹Although the official voices of the dominant organized culture were, as I have shown, openly anti-gay, spectators attending bodybuilding contests, whether self-identified as gay or not, could have related to the spectacle on the basis of an erotic gaze (too). Although conventions of representation of the built body in formal competition (as well as in the 'proper' muscle magazines) were different than the eroticized ones of 'blue'/'beefcake' magazines, it is certainly plausible to think of live contests as another legal avenue for a homoerotic gaze in a culture of prohibition. Nevertheless, a more detailed exploration of this issue is beyond the scope of the present thesis.

personal benefits and for the knowledge they can give the world. We want to see just how far they can go... how big muscles can be built - and through this knowledge bodybuilding will be advanced and progress rapidly. We must establish a contest for the greats - and through this contest the greatest of the greats would emerge.

(excerpts from editorial in *Muscle Builder*, April 1965: 4, emphasis in original)

The above is how the Mr. Olympia contest, the pinnacle in professional bodybuilding competition, was first announced in its year of inception, 1965 by up-and-coming entrepreneur, self-proclaimed 'trainer of champions,' and co-founder of the emerging IFBB, Joe Weider. In more than one way it marks the mid-1960s progressive introduction and solidification of the new paradigm in the culture, that of 'pure' bodybuilding. Breaking with the established modus operandi of having bodybuilding contests held as 'side-shows' after the 'main' weightlifting competition, the IFBB staged them as autonomous events, even if at times accompanied by other forms of physical entertainment. The contest format and judging criteria designated as the sole objective of competition the demonstration of one's muscular development to one's best advantage, revolving thus exclusively around body aesthetic.

At an organizational level, these initiatives were often framed in the grand rhetoric of a 'cause' or 'movement' of bodybuilding. As argued previously, the antagonisms over the 'proper' definition of bodybuilding competition rampant in the middle period are inseparable from attempts at institutional control and economic growth. Central in this are claims of authority and expertise framed in terms of representing the 'real' needs of a community of embodied practice that is being constituted through this very process. The following editorial 'A Frame for Muscles' by Ben Weider, Joe's brother, business partner, and president of the IFBB, is a manifesto-like example of the above:

For more years than I care to remember, the sport of bodybuilding has floundered about like a fish out of water, frantically in search of its home. For a few it became some kind of prize plum that could be used purely to serve the interests of another sport, and for others it was held in some strange category of a pseudo-freak show [...] Anyone who went to the trouble of caring enough about the only body he'd ever possess to develop it to its maximum physical potential was 'crazy.' [...] The answer to our

problems came partially in the formation of the IFBB. At last bodybuilding had a 'voice.' It wasn't just a collection of 'musclebound' freaks posing in front of a mirror all day. [...] After years of long struggle we felt that the bodybuilding movement had reached the degree of maturity to set down its beliefs on paper and to organise those beliefs into the rules set forth by a constitution.

(*Muscle Builder/Power*, May 1971: 6)

Steps towards international networking and recognition from existing sporting authorities paved the road in this period for an organizational autonomy for 'pure' bodybuilding that was discursively constructed in a language of self-determination. The rhetoric of an 'international brotherhood' and cooperation in the interests of a common 'cause,' which actively produced not only a particular community of practice but also an alliance of forces at a global level, needs to be appreciated in light of power relations and an environment of tight institutional control that at the time worked against the IFBB. Insisting on the dichotomy between amateurs and professionals that still carried significant weight in the sport world (Fair 1999, 2006), the dominant US organization of the AAU, often in cooperation with its Europe counterparts upholding the amateur model, would systematically and publicly exercise pressure on the IFBB and the interests it represented by banning and ex-communicating bodybuilders who participated in its events.

Reconfiguring Masculinity: Legitimizing the Emphasis on Appearance

The reconfiguring of a particular masculinity lies behind many of the debates in the middle period over body ideals and the tension, highlighted or bridged, between ability and appearance, 'substance' and 'surface.' In juxtaposition to the status-quo emphasising strength and functional fitness, manifested in the aesthetic of the 'rugged' body, the new paradigm produced muscular development, and by extension a focus on appearance, as a legitimate index in itself for a sense of male self. At the level of elite practice, muscular development, i.e. body aesthetic, got framed as a type of athletic performance and the sole criterion in bodybuilding competition. In the publications of this faction, the perception of pursuing bodybuilding for 'its own sake' as 'narcissist' and, thus, a failure of

manhood was regularly attacked. Through this, a sense of community of practice and belief was gradually produced in opposition to both an 'ignorant' general public and a 'malignant' neighbouring faction of the sport community.

At times, legitimacy was still opted for by aligning bodybuilding with 'established' indexes of masculinity. The following editorial is an example of such a framing that can be viewed as normative in its recourse to traditional 'manly' qualities, such as bodily strength, ability, and hard work.

Every muscleman eventually hears the stinging remark: 'You're just a mirror athlete.' You got big muscles but they're just inflated balloons. You're not strong, not athletic, and I got a friend half your size who can lift twice as much. Well brother, that hurts –even when it comes from an average guy. And when it comes from other weight men who should be more knowledgeable, like power lifters or weightlifters- it hurts twice as much. Of course we know that anyone who derides bodybuilding is acting out of sheer jealousy. Those who criticize the most secretly crave a handsome physique but haven't got the ambition to work for it. Power lifters are usually shapeless and beefy so they are obviously envious of a musclebuilder's well-cut-up appearance. Weightlifters look a little better but they lack symmetry, proportion and development so they're jealous as cats, too. Only the bodybuilder exhibits perfect muscular development and a high degree of strength, too.

(*Muscle Builder*, May 1967: 9)

At other times, legitimacy was sought on the basis of a sense of distinction particular to the emerging culture of 'pure' bodybuilding; that is to say, without resorting to 'outside' referents but supporting the 'thing in itself' in a non-apologetic fashion, according to 'its own logic.' In this case, it is the rhetoric of individual choice and lifestyle that is given priority. The editorial 'The Price of Believing' quoted below is an example of this: allegedly answering the anxieties of a reader and bodybuilding practitioner, it sketches the foundations for an individual and group identity which, based on notions of liberal individualism, gives the law to itself (Eagleton 1990). Distinction is here built precisely on a notion of a 'unique,' 'authentic' community of practice and belief, of vision and perseverance against 'ordinary,' 'average' thinking:

In the letter he [the reader] extolled the virtues of our sport while at the same time he seemed a bit ashamed. How can that be? Easy. He digs

bodybuilding but is too sensitive about what others think. His buddies, none of whom train with weights, seem like the type who major in the rising sport of table tennis and beer drinking. Naturally, they know all the answers. Bodybuilding is a waste of time. An endeavour indulged in only by 'odd' fellows and morons. [...] This deal about 'male beauty contestants' and 'mirror athletes' is so old you'd think the lies would have died from the fall of tripping over their own beards. [...]

Now let's get down to business. A physique contest *is* a 'male beauty contest.' Yeah, I know it sounds a lot guttier to say a 'male-big-strong-muscle contest' but, whatever you call it, a physique contest is one that is held to find the *best looking* male physique. [...] So, this means I should give up bodybuilding? Nuts. If some guy told me that football was a game for sissies should I stop looking at it so that *he* shouldn't think that *I* was one? Of course not. [...] Who is *anyone* to tell you what to think? Here we have the sport of bodybuilding. An exciting sport of muscular he-men. Not because *I* say so but because *you* believe it. [...] Fighting is the price for believing in something. Those men who usually own those big sets of lumps have had to endure the remarks of stupid people. He didn't stop because they bothered him. More often than not, the champion became a champion in spite of the stupid remarks of the jealous and the misinformed.

(*Muscle Builder/Power*, February 1969: 5, 57, emphasis in original)

What unites the various strands of rhetoric used to legitimate the world of 'pure' bodybuilding is its direct or indirect construction as heterosexual, both 'proper' and 'hip.' The documentary-type book and film *Pumping Iron* (1974 and 1977 respectively) become important here as critical representations of the new paradigm, forming and projecting an impression of the culture outside its immediate borders. Introducing this particular bodybuilding culture to a whole generation of American and international audiences, the film in particular combines structure, narrative, and cinematography to portray it as virile, straight, and 'cool' (Holmlund 1997). In line with a wider cultural shift that renders the male an object of desire and sexual performer, built bodies are framed as potent, sexy, proud, and successful. The bright scenery of California, regularly employed in IFBB publications from the early 1970s onwards as the new focal point of the culture, carries into the light -literally and metaphorically- a culture of a previously marginal, 'dubious' reputation. Bodybuilders are painted with the same stroke as both light-hearted pleasure-seekers and serious athletes-achievers. In *Pumping Iron*, as well as in endless instances in the specialised media, organized sport and the logic of undertaking (physical) challenges transpire as the legitimating matrix for the male identity I explore here.

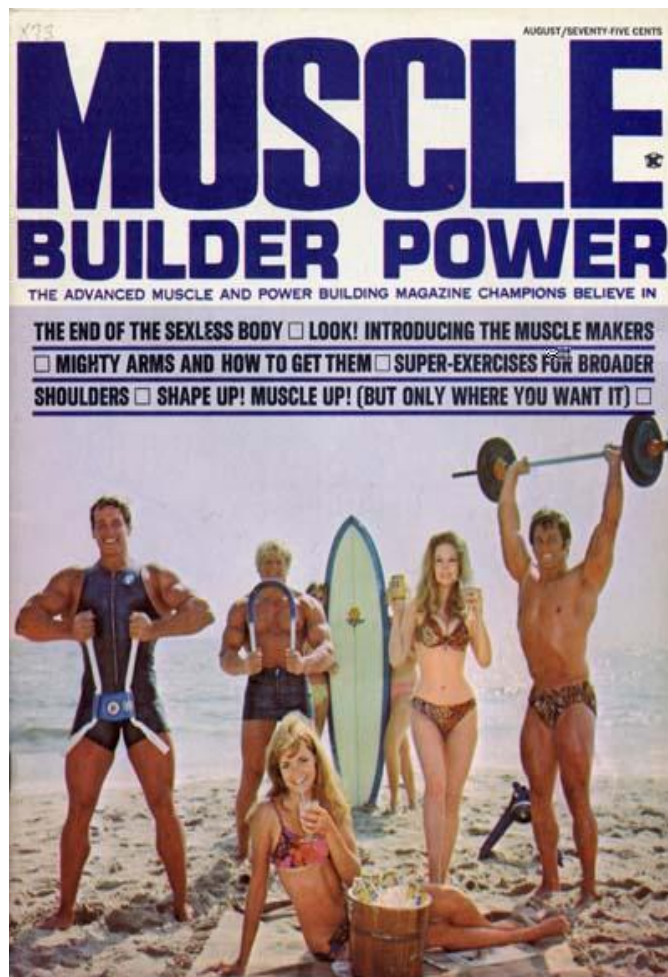


Image 9 *Muscle Builder/Power* magazine cover, August 1970⁷²

A typical 1970s cover of the leading publication of the IFBB and Weider enterprises. Subtitled 'The Advanced Muscle and Power Building Magazine Champions Believe In,' it features bodybuilding's rising 'stars' Schwarzenegger, Zane, and Draper flexing their muscles and smiling under the Californian sun, visibly fit and virile. The women in the photo both enhance the heterosexual profile of the bodybuilders and facilitate the promotion of a particular model of 'fitness' across the sexes. A number of Weider bodybuilding technologies are 'casually' showcased (ranging from exercise equipment to food supplements), while the surfing board at the centre of the image serves as a highly recognizable symbol that situates the culture of the built body in the West Coast, USA's most 'in' place and constant frontier of (self) re-invention.

⁷²Image source: <http://musclememory.com/magCover.php?mb;197008;Muscle+Builder; ac.> 05.10.2011.

A New Model of Competition: Professional Bodybuilding as Crystallisation of the New Paradigm

Apart from providing a respectable frame of reference for the cultivation and exposure of the male body, the discourse of 'serious' sport competition is used in this period to frame in positive terms the 'internal' logic of the new paradigm in bodybuilding. A device regularly used in publications promoting 'pure' bodybuilding is comparing it with culturally celebrated sporting activities, effectively translating it in such terms that a 'mainstream' standpoint is expected to not only recognize but respect as well. In this sense, the self-referentiality of the ongoing pursuit of muscular development is situated in an established system of other organized endeavors that operate according to the same logic. Thus, what from an 'outsider' perspective constitutes the peculiar or even transgressive character of pursuing bodybuilding 'for its own sake' is recuperated as the very thing that makes it legitimate. Explaining what bodybuilding competition is in *Pumping Iron*, Arnold Schwarzenegger –appearing in the film as himself– frames its 'natural' logic as follows:

Obviously a lot of people look at you and think it is kind of strange, you know...but those are the people who don't know much about it. As soon as you find out what this whole thing is about, then it is just like any other thing. I mean it is not any stranger than going into a car and trying to go ¼ of a mile in 5 seconds. That is for *me* strange.

The whole field of organized competition assumes a new meaning in its capacity as a social mechanics that builds the very 'drive' for muscular development which it purportedly accommodates. Professional competition in particular transpires as the crystallisation of this pursuit of continuous development, often spoken in terms of 'challenging oneself' and 'breaking barriers.' An instance of this is the August 1968 guest editorial 'Why Am I An IFBB Member?' in *Muscle Builder/Power*, the publication promoting Weider enterprises and official journal of the IFBB. Employing the figure of bodybuilding champion Frank Zane as the 'narrator' of a personal account, an organic relation is painted between a particular motivation for embodied practice, the role of professional competition events, and the institutions that foster these:

...my first IFBB show really inspired me. I saw there was an organisation that cared enough to form a professional federation of bodybuilders and conduct professional physique presentations. Yes, to me the IFBB was a marked contrast to the @#\$\$% [he is referring to the competing organisation AAU] which had relegated physique shows to insignificance by featuring them as 'added attractions' at weightlifting contests. Let me explain how IFBB policy is in total accord with my goals:

1. My chief goal is to make continual improvement in my physical development. I can always look to the personal advice of IFBB chief Joe Weider and the Weider research Clinic to help me analyse my progress and shortcomings. [...]
2. I use IFBB contests as my incentive to train harder. And what better contests are there than the IFBB events? Here I know that I am being judged fairly, and my chances of making a good impression on the audience are excellent because I will be presented in a professional manner and under the best of conditions [...]
3. Finally, I believe that if one has a goal which he thinks high enough, he owes it to himself and the people that look up to him to seek to reach this goal to the best of his ability. In other words, if I care enough about working at a job, such as bodybuilding, then I'll do everything I can to accomplish the best results. Yet, if it were not for the IFBB who knows where I'd be today in the physique world? Probably still trying for mediocre gains and having to rely on second-rate @#\$\$% physique contests as a training incentive. Surely I would be known as 'America's Fastest Rising Bodybuilder' and aiming for the highest titles as I am today.

(Muscle Builder/Power, August 1968: 5, 66)

Fundamental to the operation of this mechanics is the production of a particular identity and status of the elite bodybuilder along with the concept of a professional career in bodybuilding. This allows for producing the masculinity that is central to this new bodybuilding culture not as marginal and ambiguous (derided as I have previously demonstrated as 'narcissistic' and 'wasteful') but partaking in the culturally-celebrated values of hard work, goal-setting, occupational achievement, and upward mobility. Simultaneously, a particular hierarchy gets formed inside the culture: constructed as authentic representatives of 'pure' bodybuilding, elite bodybuilders, and especially professional ones, emerge as its ideal subjects, literally embodying its desires and visions. In

instances such as the one cited above, this construction assumes the form of first-person narratives of success and self-actualisation. At other times, it takes place in more rudimentary ways, which precisely reflects the formative nature of this process. An example of this is the following whole-page advertisement for the 1967 IFBB Mr. America, Mr. World, Mr. Olympia and Miss Americana Muscle/Beauty Show at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. The text is clearly broken down into sections entitled 'Contestants' and 'Fans,' each detailing the benefits for the category of participants involved:

CONTESTANTS

WORLD'S MOST COVETED PHYSIQUE TITLES!

YOUR CHANCE FOR FAME AND FORTUNE...WORLD PUBLICITY FOR EVERY CONTESTANT! Every contestant will be photographed by world-famous physique photographer Caruso for the pages and covers of *Muscle Builder* and *Mr. America* and by the international press for leading newspapers and magazines. Many powerful theatrical producers and agents will attend. This means maximum exposure -which can easily lead to a career in the movies...and thousands of dollars.

MORE THAN 40 BEAUTIFUL TROPHIES...SOME VALUED AT \$800 EACH! In past years outstanding trophies towering 7 inches high have been awarded. The trophies this year will be more impressive than ever- a tribute to the bodybuilder...a treasure to possess. [...]

\$1000 CASH PRIZE MONEY FOR MR. OLYMPIA WINNER

(Muscle Builder, May 1967: 10, emphasis in original)

The 'Muscle Scene:' 'Insider' Publics and Ways of Looking

With elite competition as its focal point, a new organized bodybuilding culture gets shaped in this period, referred to as 'the muscle world,' 'muscledom,' or 'the sport/scene of bodybuilding.' A vital part of this process is the production of a specialized audience: 'muscle fans.' Actively brought into being through the star culture under construction, this new type of 'sport fan' follows the 'scene,' identifies with and idolizes elite bodybuilders as role-models and celebrities, appreciates 'properly' the formal displays of the built body, and partakes in a shared sense of distinction. Entitled 'Fans,' the second section of the contest promotion cited above discursively produces these practices and their proper

meaning as it details them:

FANS

4 GREAT CONTESTS FOR THE PRICE OF ONE! Nowhere else in the entire world will you see nearly 150 champion bodybuilders on any single stage in competition in a single evening.

WORLD'S MOST FABULOUS MUSCLE/BEAUTY SHOW- ALL THE TOP CHAMPS IN COMPETITION! See all your favorites [...] in their famous posing routines, in their best shape and determined to win.

MEET THE STARS IN PERSON AFTER THE SHOW! As in past years, it is customary to meet the stars after the show at the stage door, where they will shake your hand and sign autographs.

PROFESSIONAL ENTERTAINMENT – MANY SURPRISES! You'll hear a top band...see tumblers and balancers and beautiful gals and strongmen - direct from Radio City.⁷³ This will be bodybuilding's most star-spangled night in 1967.

(ibid)

Apart from being a promotional device in their own right, contest publicity and reports are a primary tool for producing the 'scene' and directly or indirectly setting out the 'proper' ways of relating to the spectacle. Therein, the discursive production of 'pure' bodybuilding culture, the specialized audience, prestige for competition bodybuilding as practice and spectacle, and a particular version of 'bodybuilding history' are all effected with one and the same stroke. This is most evident in the discursive articulation of events and organizations in their early stages, as they are being introduced:

The night of the show was charged with more electricity than a power plant. You could feel it so strongly that you were afraid to rub your feet on a rug. This was it. The World Series and the Super Bowl all in one. Who would win [IFBB] Mr. America? Who would win Mr. World? Who would win Mr Olympia? [...] and, when would all of you reading this now be able to hear the results? [...] Now listen real good- things happened this night of nights that will make bodybuilding history brighter than ever before. There was more excitement and news than I have ever gathered at a contest before [...] stay tuned and you'll never forget what you read.

(*Muscle Builder/Power*, December 1968: 20, 64)

⁷³Renowned music hall in New York City.

Significantly for my project, along with the vocabularies and imagery of 'excitement' borrowed from the popular amusement industry to speak the bodybuilding spectacle, a notion of a 'learned' gaze is gradually solidified. Thus, 'muscle fans' emerge as an audience of connoisseurs who 'know how to look,' familiar with the code and history of 'the sport' which is being produced in particular ways through this process. Although references to the 'high' canon of classical art persist in representations of the 'good' body, a sense of a 'code' that is internal to the culture develops and gets negotiated during this period. At an institutional level, this is reflected in attempts for standardising and formalising judging criteria and guidelines, as well as putting in place training and qualification structures for judges of bodybuilding competition. Unlike the early period discussed in the previous chapter, judges are increasingly culture 'insiders.'

These developments also discursively prioritize the culture's 'own' tradition and networks of enculturation. Notions of the 'good' and -by extension- 'better' body, how to recognise it and create it, are intensely debated in the main carrier and public forum of the culture, the muscle magazines. At this juncture, this is a process that often takes place in an overt, explicitly instructional manner through regular articles on competition judging. An example of this are the following excerpts from an extensive piece entitled 'IFBB Judges Say Muscle Density is the Critical Factor in Determining Who Are the Best Built Men:'

Impressiveness, striking muscular impressiveness, seems to distinguish the winners from the losers at today's premiere bodybuilding contests [...] Also essential is keeping in the mainstream of physique trends [...] To a man the judges concluded that the single most important feature today's bodybuilders must strive for is 'Muscle Density.' This is a new term and it means displaying the maximum good-looking muscle over every square inch of the body. And what is good-looking muscle? *It is muscle developed to the maximum massive size where deep cuts can still be drilled in and look impressive* [...] to learn more about IFBB judging standards ask your local IFBB officials for their comments on what makes a superior body. These dedicated men are in the iron game only to help you. Do not train improperly for years, wondering why you can't win contests. We have told you what the judges look for. Now go out and build it.

(*Muscle Builder/Power*, February 1969: 15, emphasis in original)

Expanding Potential: Specialization, Progress, and Distinction

Coterminous with the shift towards 'insider,' 'learned' ways of appreciating the spectacle of the built body is a different way of practising and understanding the embodied practice. In the context of the new paradigm, advancements in specialised technologies reproduce and legitimate the emerging motif of 'muscle-for-muscle's sake.' One aspect of this is the increasing differentiation between training systems that have weight-training at their core. Thus, in juxtaposition to weight-lifting and power-lifting, bodybuilding comes to significantly incorporate 'isolation training:' the extensive use of exercises or even whole training programs targeting individual muscles or muscle-groups gains ground as the most 'efficient' method. Such developments in terms of training, diet, and use of pharmaceuticals for 'pure' bodybuilding are not only intensified from the 1960s onwards, but also vested with a certain distinction deriving from a wider Western paradigm that values specialization of performance and its correlative, that is maximization of 'efficiency.'

These processes can be situated in the larger 'human potential' movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Hoberman 2005). Siding not with its countercultural strands but with those extolling productivity and performance, the new culture of 'pure' bodybuilding produces the body as a terrain for applying and visualizing a particular model of growth and self-realization. In this context, a field of elite practice emerges as the 'vanguard' of a whole movement in technological innovation and applied experimentation. An example of such discourse is the article 'And Giants Shall Walk Upon the Land' that paints bodybuilders as a special breed of 'visionaries' whose personal experimentations make possible a 'forward' trajectory at a social level. Allegedly inspired by TV coverage of attempts at getting man on the moon, an account of bodybuilding history is presented in the article based on a narrative of progress towards 'the impossible of a few years ago.' Beginning with Sandow and the early days of physical culture, the evolutionary account moves on to the 1930s and, finally, to the advancements of the day:

Why, wondered Weider, did some men have such great physiques while others got nothing out of the same program? The glib answer was always something about 'potential.' Slowly, and with great care, Joe experimented [...] He began to progress again [...] To further his aim of bringing out the

most there is in bodybuilding, Joe Weider formed the 'Weider Research Clinic.' This didn't mean a group of men running around in white jackets. It meant finding the top bodybuilders who were willing to experiment with new or different training procedures. [...] Out of this concept some of the most advanced training ideas were developed. But this wasn't enough for Joe Weider. I remember when he started his Guinea Pig series. These were experimental exercises and programs that he would publish in the magazines for the readers to work with and report the results. Results started to pour in. 17-inch arms were soon common. Then 18-inch arms became common...now Joe started adding more sophisticated nutritional ideas in the form of supplements. [...] Today, more than ever before, we are living in an age of giants [...] Joe Weider is the Columbus among us who is discovering the giant that dwells in all of us.

(Muscle Builder/Power, March 1970: 8, 63)

Apart from functioning as a legitimating discourse for bodybuilding as organized culture, this move towards specialization also brings forth a new approach to the embodied practice. In juxtaposition to the numerous early writings on bodybuilding stressing the importance of holistic development of the human constitution, expert advice in subsequent periods is produced around what is 'relevant' and 'irrelevant,' 'productive' and 'counterproductive' to achieving certain performance goals. As I have shown earlier on, the 'look' gets framed as precisely a type of specialized performance.

It is particularly in the context of professional bodybuilding and its winning ethos that a particular instrumental approach to the embodied practice gets articulated for the first time in the mid-late 1960s. Far from limited to the elite field and preparation regimens for formal competition, this approach trickles down to the 'lower,' lay levels of a hierarchy of practice that gets constituted through this very process. Thus, elite bodybuilders transpire as experts in the art of goal-setting, efficient performance, and maximization of results. Typical examples of this are the various advices for beginners, such as avoiding physical activity apart from their bodybuilding training lest that the latter suffers and, by extension, the practitioner's bodybuilding goals slowed down or never fully materialise. An instance of this is the wisdom up-and-coming star Arnold Schwarzenegger, endlessly featured in the internationally circulated magazines, imparts to bodybuilders interested in maximizing their results: "walk slowly, slide along [in order not to unnecessarily burn calories or tire the muscles] [...] go to

bed and force yourself to sleep [in order to get the rest necessary to recuperate from hard training]" (*Muscle Builder/Power*, May 1969: 52).

Towards 'Bigger and Better' Things: The Aesthetic of Growth

The reality and discourse of specialisation, performance and technological experimentation generates in this period new notions of the 'good' body. The late 1960s and early 1970s are marked by the onset of a technophilic aesthetic in the culture (Monaghan 2001). Moving away from an early model in bodybuilding that I explored in Chapter 4, 'perfection' is understood less as a quest for an established ideal, a return to a past that cannot possibly be exceeded; rather, it is gradually reconceptualized as an open-ended project, shaped by a future-oriented logic of potentiality and the continuous surpassing of human limits. In this sense, the bodies built through the application of various technologies, including drugs for the first time, are understood as 'advanced,' thus 'better,' bodies. The references borrowed from general culture are suggestive: drawing on a contemporary fascination with space projects, it is not only exercise equipment, food supplements, and training methods that are spoken as belonging to a 'new generation' of progress, but individual bodybuilders, too. Thus, Arnold Schwarzenegger is advertised as "the 21 year old new phenomenon of the space-age muscleworld" whose life and career was irrevocably transformed by coming to contact with the latest specialized bodybuilding technologies available in Weider magazines, published in the USA and distributed in Europe (*Muscle Builder/Power*, May 1969: 10).

The passage from one model of 'perfection' to another is also reflected in how body measurements come to be read in a different way. As shown in the previous chapter, early bodybuilders engaged in producing canons of body measurements that would define 'scientific,' 'objective' body ideals. The goal of development was a fixed one, effectively rendering measurements a method for comparing one's achievement to a golden standard that could only be imitated. Body measurements of bodybuilders remain important in subsequent decades, yet they hold a different meaning: instead of tools for 'objective' evaluations, they progressively come to be viewed as indicators serving a preoccupation with boundless growth, an ever-expanding goal *in themselves*. This emphasis on unlimited development as an objective in its own right finds its expression in the

aesthetic of 'bigger is better.'

The aesthetic of boundless growth comes to apply equally to bodies of individuals, institutions, events and globally-expanding models of bodybuilding. A reflection of a wider climate of affluence and technological progress, this aesthetic is also, I claim, that of professional competition as a business model. The vocabularies employed to speak of subjects, practices and moments, borrowing from the world of professional sports and the amusement industry, attest to this. Thus, the 1969 Mr. Universe, Mr. America and Mr. Olympia contests are recounted as the "the biggest event in bodybuilding history [...] The Show of Shows [...] the mammoth IFBB muscle get-together" (*Muscle Builder*, February 1970: 23). Rising sensation Arnold Schwarzenegger, introduced as the "100-MEGATON BODYBUILDER [...] The mammoth physique sensation [...] this mastodonic monument to muscles" (*Muscle Builder/Power*, August 1968: 10), is touted as "now in America, in California, training under Joe Weider personal supervision- he will meet Sergio [reigning champion] in September, at a bodyweight of 250 pounds, showing perfect muscular density. Will Sergio be able to beat this monster from Austria?" (*Muscle Builder/Power*, March 1969: 74).

In this framing, the ethos of fierce competition and winning is communicated in a dramatic language of excitement, hyperbole, and spectacle. As John Fair (2006) has shown, this was at the time in competition with a European 'school' in the UK, France and elsewhere whose celebration of 'balanced,' 'aesthetically-pleasing' physiques and emphasis on 'quality' of development reflected its model of amateur competition and sport participation. Austria-born Schwarzenegger's transition from the top amateur championships of Europe to the professional ones of the US marks in many ways a late-60s/early-70s shift in the 'centre' of bodybuilding culture and the domination of the 'muscle for muscle's sake' paradigm that comes to set the tone on a global scale.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored core developments in organised bodybuilding culture in what I have termed the middle period (1940s-1970s), and in particular the USA 'scene' that becomes during this time-span the focal point of a global canvas. Focusing on two critical events, the Mr. America and Mr. Olympia

contests, to guide my discussion, I have tried to identify competing models of bodybuilding at the level of body aesthetics, embodied practices, organizations, and the meanings these were vested with. As I have shown, a process of reconfiguring masculinity is crucial in the antagonism between these models. The dynamics of this I have tried to locate at the intersection between gender paradigms, economic systems and business rationales, and contemporary cultural fascinations.

More specifically, I have shown that a shift gradually takes place in this period from one dominant order to another. The status-quo up until the mid-1960s, associated with the AAU and shaped by and reproducing a post-war gender politics, aligned physical culture with patriotism and 'proper' citizenship. In this context, bodybuilding competition was framed as in search of representatives of 'ideal manhood' in both physical and moral terms. The physical imperatives of all-around development, ability, and strength found their moral counterpart in a vision of the elite bodybuilder as a well-rounded personality, 'wholesome,' a role model for the nation's youth. The 'unmanly' Other against which this hegemonic, heteronormative ideal was largely defined ranged from the 'narcissistic' and the 'weak' to the 'perverse' and 'queer.' Essential to this 'high-minded' framing of physical culture and bodybuilding was an ethos of amateur sport competition.

The competing model of the IFBB got introduced in the mid-1960s and eventually came to prevail. In a wider climate of affluence and hedonism, it produced the male as both object of desire and 'achiever.' Instead of dubious and compromising, taking care of oneself and one's looks was recuperated as a legitimate index of masculinity. In fact, the cultivation of the body, identified in the previous chapter in terms of a duty of 'rational recreation,' was progressively drawn unto the paradigm of potentiality and continuous development (Hoberman 2005). Concomitantly, achieving masculinity came to partly interweave with a notion of fulfilling one's 'potential.' The far end of this continuum of development and self-actualization, distinct and distinguishing, was the 'elite' field of bodybuilding competition. There, muscular development and body aesthetic got framed as an instance of sports performance, and the only criterion for evaluating excellence.

The introduction of a model of professional sport competition for 'pure' bodybuilding becomes crucial in more than one ways. Firstly, it lent further legitimacy to a masculinity that carried the stigma of feminine, i.e. 'unmanly,'

traits. Notions of effort, fierce competition and a relentless drive to win, and a career in bodybuilding neutralized suspicions of being 'narcissistic' and 'wasting' one's time with frivolous preoccupations. In the process, there was a move away from grand and overt ideological frameworks (such as social service for the national community), and towards a more oblique ideology of individual success. In addition, the configuration of bodybuilding as a professional sport was painted as a triumph of self-determination for a whole community of embodied practice and identity that was being constituted through this very process. Discursively produced in terms of bodybuilding 'coming unto its own' and being 'liberated' from a dominant order that had previously controlled it and 'kept it down,' professional competition served as an expression at an institutional level of liberal individualism's mantra of 'free choice' and autonomy. Finally, it brought forth a culturally celebrated specialization of performance and maximization of 'efficiency.' 'Science' remained central, not in terms, though, of an 'objective' ideal and a method for re-establishing 'normality' in an 'unbalanced world' as I have discussed in the previous chapter on the culture's early period, but in terms of a futuristic aesthetic of potentiality, and a magic 'toolbox' enabling limitless experimentation.

In its exclusive emphasis on the body's appearance and its introduction of professional competition, the new model was met with considerable resistance from the previous dominant order in the US and its European counterparts supporting amateur sport (Fair 1999; 2003). These antagonisms and alliances of forces were constituted and played out at an international terrain. The mechanics of a bodybuilding industry whose origins I identified in the previous chapter become in this period both more integrated and wide-reaching. Competition events, magazines, and individual bodybuilders were systematically employed as a 'showcase' of competing factions inside the organized culture and their interests, commercial or otherwise. Given that much of this power game rests on the impact and resonance of impressions, the eventual domination of the 'muscle for muscle's sake' paradigm on a global level can be greatly attributed to the fact that, in its exaltation of exteriority, hyperbole, and visual effect, it lends itself more easily to spectacle and the power of the image. The long-term effects of the shift of paradigm that I have identified in this chapter will become evident in the following four chapters where I discuss some of the core dimensions of today's dominant bodybuilding culture and its ideal of the 'freaky' body.

Chapter 6

'Breaking Boundaries: 'Freaky' Bodies and the Paradigm of Elite Sport Performance

Introduction

The present is the first of four chapters that explore what I have termed the late period of dominant, organized bodybuilding culture, from 1980s-present. It is during this period that the notions, vocabularies, and imagery of the 'freaky' body emerge and eventually become dominant.⁷⁴ In crucial ways, this is a paradigm that has been shaped in the US and exported on a global level. In the previous chapter I have traced the tentative introduction of the core tenets of this paradigm in the late-1960s/early-1970s. The integrated mechanics that has allowed it to become dominant from the 1980s onwards has various components, the most important ones being the absolute institutional control established by the governing body of the IFBB and its affiliate, the NPC, over professional and amateur bodybuilding in the USA, in conjunction with its global institutional expansion (the IFBB international amateurs); the international circulation of North-American magazines; the global reach of bodybuilding technologies that represent commercial interests and a model of bodybuilding associated with key players in the USA; and the production of the US 'scene,' and its professional division in particular, as the 'centre' of bodybuilding both at the level of discourse and at the level of career opportunities. Although the Web becomes important from the early 2000s onwards, it appears to me that the challenges it has so far posed to a dominant, organized culture that has become nearly omnipotent at the level of institutions and naturalized at the level of perceptions are overshadowed by its direct or indirect reinforcement of it.

The above picture has shaped my methodology for the empirical chapters. As far as the present chapter goes, I have relied extensively on my two lengthy interviews with one of my principal respondents, Bill Dobbins, and I have used these encounters to structure my discussion sections. The reason for this choice is twofold:

⁷⁴Although varieties of the 'freaky' built body exist inside the culture, I focus on what unites them as expressions of the same dominant paradigm of the past 30 years.

firstly, Bill has been an influential figure in the dominant, America-based, organized bodybuilding culture over the span of nearly four decades. Since the mid-1970s he has been involved in it in multiple capacities, including promoter of contests and gyms; federation official, having contributed to the design of competition rules at both the professional and amateur level; judge at bodybuilding competitions; bodybuilding magazine writer, having begun writing for *Muscle Builder* and later turned founding editor of *FLEX*, that is two of the major publications I have researched for the present thesis; as book writer, most notably co-authoring with Arnold Schwarzenegger the initial *Arnold's Encyclopaedia of Modern Bodybuilding* (1987) and its subsequently revised and updated edition (1999) that is considered by many as reference work; bodybuilding video director and professional photographer, having worked for practically all the major, USA-based specialised publications.

Secondly, I have found that his views, laid out in detail in our interviews and in his many writings, represent prevalent accounts that I have repeatedly come across in one form or another while researching the dominant culture of the past 30 years. As will become evident further down, Bill typifies the perspective according to which the development of male bodybuilding has been a 'natural' process. In this light, the 'freaky' body of the culture's late period is the 'logical' culmination of decades of 'evolution' marked by increasingly sophisticated know-how and technological progress. In the 'matter-of-factly' quality of his responses that initially stroke me in our encounters I subsequently came to recognise precisely the strength of the dominant paradigm, that is its 'commonsensical' thrust.

Apart from an interpretative approach that looks at the subjective understandings of those inside the culture, I also try to trace the 'objective,' factual aspects of the picture that explains the (re)production of dominant bodybuilding culture. The present chapter focuses on the field of organized competition as the focal point for the production and display of the 'freaky, 'extreme' body. Unlike other chapters where variations between the different decades making up a given period become important for the discussion, the themes and developments identified in this chapter appear to me to largely hold true for the whole of the late period. More specifically, I explore how the model of bodybuilding that gives birth to the 'freaky' body is signified, and what is the wider cultural system it is placed in. Essential aspects of this equation are prevailing perceptions regarding the 'true meaning' or 'nature' of bodybuilding, the criteria of evaluating excellence, types of and motivations for practice, and how all these give shape and are reproduced by a series

of hierarchies. What emerges out of the discussion is also the particular ways the past is interpreted from the standpoint of the dominant present, and how changes and continuities are produced and accounted for. By contrasting today's accounts with the findings of the previous chapters, I attempt to put the 'naturalness' of the dominant present in context and point to its cultural and historical specificity.

'Freaks' as 'Better' Bodies: Dominant Accounts of the Culture's Development

In my exploration of the current dominant bodybuilding culture, I typically started off my interviews with questions on body aesthetics as a point of entry into a whole nexus of meanings, frames, and practices. Having familiarized myself with discussions taking place in bodybuilding magazines and online fora, I inquired as to the current direction celebrating the 'freaky,' 'extreme' body, asking how we had come to that and what other possible directions could exist.

Bill Dobbins, one of my principal respondents and key figure in organised bodybuilding culture, was familiar with these discussions already, yet refused to engage with the notion that there *could* be an alternative. The argument which encapsulated his interpretation, the simplest yet laden with meaning, was that the exemplary bodies of today, i.e. those recognized as the 'cream' by being granted victory at formal competitions, are essentially 'better' bodies compared to those of their contemporaries and of bodybuilders of the past.

To answer your question generally, the reason these people won the greatest competition events is because they were *better* [...] if you stand Lee Haney next to Dorian Yates [former Mr. Olympia champions in chronological order], both at their absolute best, Dorian is going to win. If you stand Dorian next to Coleman [Mr. Olympia champion at the time of the interview], Coleman is going to win. If you line up all the best bodybuilders there ever were, Coleman is going to win.

DL: Are you saying then that the way things have progressed and the physiques we have seen so far are the only logical outcome of the whole thing?

BD: If you look at what the goal is, that is to get the maximum development of the physique that satisfies traditional aesthetics, meaning symmetry, shape, proportion, definition etc., then somebody who gets more of all that is going to be better. I look at bodybuilding the way I look at opera. To be an opera singer you need a powerful voice but it is not enough to sing loud. You need to have this powerful voice that is aesthetic. But the aesthetics of opera singing is not the aesthetics of Britney Spears. It has its own aesthetic. [...] So

bodybuilding is the grand opera of the body. It is about the maximum of development according to certain aesthetic standards. And those aesthetic standards are not necessarily those of everyday life...

Apart from the comparisons drawn with established cultural forms, what I find of interest in such accounts are the references to a tradition or code particular to bodybuilding. It is in light of this 'inside' standard of the 'good' body, itself understood as a cumulative process, that today's freaky bodies are appreciated as 'better' bodies. In an attempt to break down the commonsensical gist of these dominant accounts, I moved on to ask how this set of aesthetic criteria according to which bodies are produced and evaluated has come about. Bill responded that

The judges do *not* set the standards. They *think* they do sometimes and Ben Weider [then president of the IFBB] would like them to do it, but that is not how bodybuilding works. It may not be how *any* sport of form works. Because if you are a gymnastics judge and everybody is doing a double something, you don't mark them down if they don't do a triple something. But let one guy do a triple something and then next year everybody better be doing a triple something. Because the gymnast or the diver sets the standard. He says 'Now I can do four and a half spin' so the guy who does three and a half...

DL: You said it before yourself, though, that sometimes opinions differ.

BD: Yes, but overtime what sets the standards is what the bodybuilders have actually been able to achieve. So as they get bigger and more defined, that becomes the standard [...]

DL: So, the way you describe it, body aesthetics change 'from the bottom up' so to speak.

BD: That's correct. The bodybuilder achieves something the judge has never seen before and that becomes the standard [...] The judges learn from the bodybuilders what good looks like.

Through this interpretative prism, today's freaky bodies are understood as a logical stage in a process of 'evolving' performance standards. In contrast to the culture' early period, this model is built on a logic of open-ended progress. In this scheme, bodybuilding as a domain of organized activity is broken down in 'stages,' with later stages being framed as 'more advanced' ones. This process of progression from one stage to the next is spoken of as a constant 'redefining of the possible.'

Here, development is dictated not any longer by a set ideal and the 'high'/'external' authority of judgment that formalizes and implements it, but by a 'bottom-up' process motored by creative individuals who themselves set the direction of their 'own' enterprise.⁷⁵

Another principal respondent of mine, Dave Palumbo,⁷⁶ held a similar account of bodybuilding's development and how past performances shape the horizon of possibilities for the present and the future. Interestingly, he drew a straightforward parallel between what he saw as the natural yet unplanned 'evolution' of bodybuilding as a field of elite performance and as a personal trajectory of embodied practice. The 'freaky' body is painted here as the materialization of the previously undreamed of at the level of both a social and an individual 'forward' movement:

DL: Would you say there has been a shift over time in the aesthetics of bodybuilding from the 'perfect human' to the 'super-human?'

DP: I don't necessarily believe that. I think people didn't think it was possible to achieve that superhuman freaky look. Before Bannister broke the 4-minute mile people thought that was impossible and whoever came close to that 4-minute mark was the greatest in the world. But he broke it and then everyone broke it cause they saw the barrier was penetrated.

⁷⁵The import of such a perspective is most evident in the discursive construction of pivotal performances in the media of the dominant bodybuilding culture. The following reporting on the victory of professional bodybuilder Jay Cutler at the 2009 Mr. Olympia is suggestive. Announcing the champion's addition to the team of elite bodybuilders sponsored by *Muscular Development* magazine, the narrative of his victory echoes my respondents' accounts of the culture's 'progress:'

Three-time Mr. Olympia Jay Cutler, the Number 1 bodybuilder on the planet, and *Muscular Development's* own returning hero, has come back to his rightful home. On September 26th, we saw history being made, as Jay Cutler, renewed, recharged, and retooled, showed up in the best shape of his life [...] and had all jaws dropping when he stepped onto the Las Vegas stage and regained his Olympia title. [...] The world of bodybuilding changed forever in that moment, as Jay not only did what few predicted he would, but exceeded all expectations, beyond anyone's wildest dreams. Jay owned the stage that night, and he set a new standard for the sport; not only by regaining his title -a feat that had never been achieved before -but by doing it with the presence and command of Zeus on Mount Olympus, in all his freaky, massive, granite-hard glory. [...] As he stood there onstage, all 268 superhuman pounds of extreme mass and conditioning- all other contenders seem to fade into the background, or simply shrink in size, by comparison. I knew I beheld one of the wonders of the bodybuilding world. [...] He has single-handedly shifted the paradigm; from this point forward, all contenders will have to compete within this new standard of excellence that Jay has set, and all I can say is -they better step up their respective games, because we are officially operating from a whole new level!

<http://forums.musculardevelopment.com/showthread.php?t=79265>; ac. 01.02.10.

⁷⁶Dave is introduced in Chapter 9 where his contribution becomes most significant for the discussion.

Likewise, bodybuilding has always evolved in stages where the athletes looked a certain way and everyone thought that's the best you could look, and all of a sudden someone breached that barrier and looked better than that so everybody went like "Oh, now we can *all* look like this." So I think that the athletes in the 1960s looked a certain way cause no one thought you could look better than that. Then Arnold came along and said "Look, I'm bigger than anyone" and all of a sudden you see *all* these guys getting bigger. And then Lee Haney came along and said "Hey, you can look even bigger" and then Dorian Yates...so it evolved into that.

DL: I see. So you're saying it is like a step-by-step progress...

DP: Yes, if you started bodybuilding you'd say to yourself "I don't like to look like this guy Dave I'm interviewing [embodying the 'extreme,' 'freaky' look], I want to look like that guy in *Men's Health* magazine" [embodying a more 'normal' look] because that's something you can realistically achieve. Once you get that, you might say "I want to look like that natural bodybuilder," [embodying a more 'advanced' look than the 'normal' one, yet still 'human' in that it remains within the non-chemically enhanced capacities of the body] and then you want to "look like that guy Dave cause I think I can do it." So your mindset constantly changes and you wanna see yourself evolving as a body.

My personal involvement with bodybuilding as well as my long-term field observations do confirm such accounts of the desire of many practitioners for incessant development, spoken in terms of 'breaking barriers' and 'making continuous progress.' This, though, constitutes a particular approach which I understand to be part of what Monaghan (2001) identifies as a process of 'becoming' in bodybuilding whereby aesthetic preferences, self-perception, and motivation for practice change over time as one immerses oneself in the culture. Accounts such as the ones cited above assume a particular conception of both 'bodybuilding' and 'progress.' In fact, the majority of my respondents seem to agree on, and thus reproduce, the 'naturalness' and 'inevitability' of the dominant direction of the culture based on what they directly or indirectly take to be the 'inherent' meaning of bodybuilding. By either not acknowledging other ways of bodybuilding now or in the past, or designating them as essentially less 'total and/or less 'advanced,' what remains undiscussed is the historical contingency of today's dominant model, the socialization it engenders, and the resulting pursuit of a particular type of body development. Thus, what in the early period was not even articulated (Chapter 4), and in the middle period proved a focal point of intense antagonisms over the 'proper' meaning of bodybuilding (Chapter 5), that is the pursuit of ongoing muscular development as an end in itself,

features now as the unchallenged rationality in the culture.

'Breaking Boundaries:' The 'Inherent' Meaning of Bodybuilding

The dominant evolutionary accounts based on a notion of a continuous surpassing of limitations point to one of the main developments I am tracing in the thesis; namely, bodybuilding, and in particular the 'extreme' variety shaped around organized competition, is consistently constructed and widely understood inside the culture as a field of elite sport performance. The framing of muscular development and, more generally, the appearance of the body on the competition stage as an instance of sport performance, introduced as I have shown in the middle period, has become the commonsensical foundation of today's paradigm. It is in the context of a paradigm of elite sport performance, exalted in the US and the West more broadly in terms of the individual athlete, that the 'freaky' body is produced, signified and appreciated. The inveterate direct references to and comparisons with established sporting activities in the vast majority of my interviews and in endless instances in bodybuilding discourses are a reflection of this, as well as a factor in its reproduction. Bill Dobbins put it succinctly in both of our interviews:

DL: I am interested in the development of bodybuilding aesthetics towards more freaky or monstrous physiques...

BD: All sports are about extremes. In fact, if they are not about extremes, they are not sports, or what I call *fundamental* sports. Fundamental sports are about testing the capacities for performance of the human body. There are team sports, like soccer or basketball etc., where you have a lot of individuals playing as a team, and of course the standards in these teams get higher and higher and the players better and better. But it is not fundamental in the sense that there doesn't *have* to be basketball. There is basketball because someone invented a sport called basketball, like soccer etc. But there are plenty of team sports that have existed in the world that don't exist anymore, especially ball sports.

Fundamental sports test the capacity of the individual human body. Now I happen to think that bodybuilding is one of those because bodybuilders develop the human body to the maximum possible aesthetic level, maximum because they are building their bodies and it is aesthetic because it is a sport of form the same way, say, gymnastics is a sport of form, there is no objective measurement of gymnastics although you can write down all the criteria that the judges are looking for. [...] Now the measure of fundamental sports is that you see overtime a gradual increase in achievement, and you can almost graph it. In the beginning it goes up fairly rapidly and then as it gets closer to the ultimate it starts to taper off and then you still get increases but they are incremental. And you can tell the maturity of a sport by that, you can tell

where it is in its development. So male bodybuilding has reached a mature stage...

By being situated in a larger system of sporting activities that enjoy cultural recognition, the dominant, 'extreme' model of bodybuilding comes to light not as an anomaly but as symbolically central. Although clearly aligned with a widespread, late-modern fascination with the limits of the human body in performance (Balsamo 1995; Hoberman 2005), the spectacle of the 'freaky' built body gets framed as far more than that: it is effectively produced as a drama of 'human nature.' In what gets portrayed as an ongoing quest for new heights, the framework of organized sport competition is often made to seem as a practical necessity, forged to foster the 'innate' desire of man to test his limits. Through a process that I have shown to originate in the USA in the middle period, the socio-economic arrangement of professional bodybuilding in particular is constantly framed in terms of the 'proper,' 'pure' environment for the unhindered development of an 'instinct.' Thus, what until the late 1960s had been a non-consideration or a deviation, that is the endless, self-referential pursuit of 'muscle for its own sake,' has since gradually become not only dominant but effectively naturalized.

Despite involving a culturally and historically specific framing of both 'sport' and 'human nature,' accounts such as the ones quoted above are part of a prevailing paradigm that comes to recognise the past in its image. Through a constant re-interpretation of the past from the standpoint of the dominant present, a unified trajectory of bodybuilding culture is built and rebuilt. Thus, other (body)cultures come to be viewed as the origins of current bodybuilding on the basis of a 'shared' rationality which is effectively produced as such through this very process. The case in point here is ancient Greece: featuring, as demonstrated in Chapter 4, as a core reference in bodybuilding's formative period, it provided a legitimate past for a newly emerging culture that celebrated the 'natural' and 'normal' body, and was used to imagine 'perfection' as a return to a golden standard. In late-modern dominant discourses glorifying the 'freaky' body as the crystallization of 'pure' bodybuilding, classical antiquity remains a pertinent reference (Johansson 1998: 3), albeit drastically re-signified: this time as the womb of the current paradigm of 'pushing the human limit' in sport competition. In this sense, it serves as the origin of the ever-developing, the futuristic, the super-human. Such formulations often inform the commercial promotion of bodybuilding technologies. In the following excerpt from

'Physical Perfection: the Eternal Quest,' essentially an advertisement for the internationally distributed line of Weider products, an uninterrupted link of continuity is forged between there and here, then and now:

Since the dawn of history, strength and physical prowess have been vitally important assets to men and women. The ancient Greeks pitted man against man and sport was born. The classic Greeks developed an admiration for well-formed men and women and bodybuilding was born.

Today's bodybuilders continue the sacred quest for physical perfection. A way to excel beyond all measures of man, a means of catapulting ordinary performance to the level of the 'Gods of Olympus' - this quest is our legacy, left to us by the ancient Greek athletes.

The modern quest for physical perfection emphasises the application of science. The Weider Research Clinic scientists together with the greatest bodybuilders of our day, are on the cutting edge of the incredible new technology that allows them to develop phenomenal, perfect physiques.

(*FLEX*, March 1985: 44)

Discourses like the above not only secure a 'high' cultural origin for 'extreme' bodybuilding but also paint it as an expression of a deep human nature. Even more importantly for the present discussion, they directly or indirectly produce today's bodies as the latest miracles in a continuous trajectory of human achievement. Through this prism, the past is understood as a 'less advanced' stage of the present:

The modern bodybuilder has followed in the footsteps of the Greek Olympian Gods. Obsessed with heroic proportions as they were, how far would the Greeks have taken physical development had they our knowledge of weight training?

(*Muscle and Fitness*, August 1984: 12, cited in Klein 1993: 259)⁷⁷

Working It Out: An 'Advanced,' Specialized Body of Knowledge and Practice

Supporting the view that today's freaky bodies are essentially 'better' bodies in light of a code particular to the culture, my respondents went on to explain, often

⁷⁷In bringing attention to the late-modern references to classical antiquity in bodybuilding culture, other research interprets it in terms of conventions of hyper-masculinity based on representations of grandeur and power (Klein 1993) and/or an instance of cultural 'pretentiousness' that betrays an attempt to appear 'high'(-er) in the cultural hierarchy (Fussell 1994).

without being directly prompted by questions of mine, how we have practically come to what is spoken as an 'advanced' level of performance. Bill Dobbins' account pointed to the sophistication that bodybuilding as a method and applied technology of physical transformation has undergone:

The thing to understand about modern bodybuilding is that the guys [elite bodybuilders] look so extraordinary and freaky because there *has* been a revolution. And it is not the drugs. That's a factor. But if you and I take all the drugs we want we are not going to look like these guys. The difference is that over the course of the last 40-50 years, bodybuilders basically by trial and error worked out the programming of the body, what it takes to build the kind of muscle that most athletes and bodybuilders in particular need, a combination of resistance and repetitions and specific exercises that it takes, and then the programme of sets and reps and rest and recuperation along with the diet that goes with it. And bodybuilders invented this. Scientists didn't invent it and doctors didn't invent it, *bodybuilders* invented it.

Dawkins, the writer about evolution, wrote in the book *The Blind Watchmaker* that evolution is not an intelligent process but a process overtime in which enough different things are tried so that those that were best are selected for. [...] It's the same in bodybuilding. There was nobody in bodybuilding that sat down in 1940 when the first Mr. America contest was held and said "Well, let's figure out how we can create Ronnie Coleman" [Mr. Olympia champion and personification of the bodybuilding 'freak' at the time of the interview]. It was just that year after year after year people tried different things and physiological and diet knowledge came about...and bodybuilders are always willing to experiment.

This progressive, technologically enabled specialization of applied know-how seems to be an indispensable aspect of the larger evolutionary accounts that render the 'freaky' body meaningful inside the culture. As in the accounts of changes in aesthetic standards, here, too, the creative, experimental individual is celebrated as the motor of social progress. Other respondents also provided similar accounts regarding an advancing body of specialized knowledge and practice that is responsible for the production of 'better' bodies and, by extension, better performances. In a joined interview, two of my respondents, a contest expeditor and manager of competition bodybuilders, and a professional fitness athlete, concurred:

DL: I am asking you about the development we see today in competition bodybuilding because in previous periods the 'top' bodies were still pretty well developed but within the realm of the imagination, so to speak. So when someone went to a bodybuilding contest in the 60s or 70s they looked at bodies that were developed far beyond their own, yet still it was something they could relate to.

KK: Things have changed dramatically for a number of reasons. First of all, the equipment is totally different. When I was training in the 1970s with the top guys that competed with Arnold and everything you didn't have all these different leg-press machines. There was only one kind of press machine, laying in your back and pushing your legs straight on. They had leg extensions, leg curls, squats and that was it. They didn't have all these different angled machines, they didn't have state of the art machines with cams that worked to make it easier at the very hardest part of the exercise etc. They didn't have that kind of technology.

Not only that, but back then you know what dieting was? For three weeks you didn't drink milk or eat red meat. That was diet. Guys now are so scientific, they measure every gram that they put in their mouth. They didn't have the nutritional supplements either. They didn't eat six or seven times a day either. Also, the athletes over-trained back then, too many sets or repetitions. It is very scientific now. And *that's* the difference.

BK: Don't get us wrong. If you follow this [old] diet, just eating good food and working out, you can get a wonderful physique. You can't help it, you will. But are you going to get a Mr. Olympia physique? No.

Directly or indirectly, such views designate a hierarchy in the wider continuum of embodied practice. Although an organic part of this continuum, an elite field of performance transpires as a qualitatively different world, the pinnacle of a whole culture of self-transformation through science. In effect, it is to a great extent constituted as an elite field on the basis of both the practical reality of increased specialization and efficiency of performance that defines it, as well as the distinction with which these are vested.⁷⁸

Significantly for the broader arguments I am making in the thesis, these perspectives further illustrate how the core developments in the culture that I have traced in Chapter 5 now serve as the taken-for-granted foundation of today's paradigm. In this instance, accounts of 'progress' that frame the 'freaky' body as a 'better' body made possible via the scientific sophistication of bodybuilding technologies assume a dominant model of practice that prioritizes muscular

⁷⁸The notions of science, performance and radical progress that my respondents have used to speak today's elite bodies as 'revolutionary' are ubiquitous in the culture. Intensified as I have shown in Chapter 5 since the 1960s, this discourse is ingrained in standard practices for the promotion of bodybuilding technologies. Held in high esteem as both advanced experts and experiments of bodybuilding science, elite, and especially professional, bodybuilders are employed by companies of bodybuilding technologies to endorse their products. In the process, 'top' bodies, commodities, communities of practice and companies amalgamate unto the paradigm of technological progress and performance.

development and the 'look.' In Chapter 8 I further explore the notion of a sport-specific body of knowledge and practice by looking at how the current concept of the 'good body' has developed in light of technologies of performance enhancement.

'Freaks of Nature:' Biological Hierarchy in Elite Performance

The dominant accounts producing today's 'freaky' bodies as 'better' bodies also include the dimension of 'natural talent,' emphasizing the role of an individual's genetic disposition for excellence in bodybuilding. In most of my interviews, and irrespectively of the capacity or level of involvement of the respondent in the organized culture of bodybuilding, the genetics discourse came up almost by default.⁷⁹ What I find important in this juncture of my discussion is that the genetics discourse further completes a picture of bodybuilding as a field of elite performance, creating yet another parallel with the world of established sporting activities. Thus, appreciating the 'extreme' bodies populating the globally-dominant 'scene' obeys to the same rules for appreciating extraordinary performances in other domains of elite performance; an understanding, that is, not only of the 'superhuman' dedication, scientific application, and 'necessary' pharmacological enhancement which I explore in Chapter 8, but also of the level of 'natural talent' involved. Bill Dobbins brought attention to the centrality of genetic disposition in the constitution of this field of elite performance:

Generally people who are *really* capable of building a lot of muscle already know who they are. It is like people know if they are fast. Sure everybody can improve and can manipulate and change their body composition. Now, when you are talking about competing for championships in any sport, there you're dealing with a bunch of metabolic and biological geniuses. They are the elite

⁷⁹Having established the currency of notions of 'genetic potential' in bodybuilding culture, Klein (1993) interprets them as an aspect of a facile use of 'scientific' discourses that permeate the culture. Monaghan (2001) focuses on how ideas of 'genetic talent' shape embodied practice, and in particular drug use for bodybuilding purposes. Although he does not examine it in detail, he mentions notions of black bodybuilders being 'genetically gifted' for bodybuilding, which are "congruent with neo-colonial ideologies of Black sporting excellence" (Cashmore 1998: 87, cited in Monaghan 2001: 187), and which may be contrasted to bodybuilding's middle period where, as mentioned in the literature review, blacks were considered as genetically *disadvantaged* for bodybuilding (Fair 2003). For Fussell (1991) 'genetic superiority' for bodybuilding is not attributed to a single racial/ethnic background, as not only black bodybuilders but also those of a 'Germanic' origin are considered 'naturally gifted.'

of the elite, they are the percentage of a percentage of a percentage.

Without canceling the democratic appeal of self-transformation that I have shown to be a constant in bodybuilding culture since its formative stages, the genetics discourse speaks of a 'natural' hierarchy in the continuum of performance and achievement. Even though the exemplary, 'freaky' bodies are, like all other built bodies, the products of an ongoing self-discipline, they are also revered as a biological elite at the level of the 'human species.' Interestingly, Bill Dobbins' discussion of genetic hierarchy pointed to historical parameters that situate its resonance not only at a synchronic level but also diachronically in light of bodybuilding's cultural trajectory:

...what I am saying is that in the case of male bodybuilding, the incredible progress that has been made is accumulation of knowledge, some of drugs and a lot of it is just genetics. Larry Scott, who was the first Mr. Olympia champion [in 1965], said that "When I got into bodybuilding it was the pencil-necks that did it. The big muscular guys would go play football or something like that. We were all the proverbial 98-pound weaklings who didn't want sand kicked in our face." Now that's not true. The best bodybuilders now are incredibly genetically gifted guys who basically don't like team sports. There's a lot of bodybuilders now who say "I was a big strong kid. I started lifting weights to be better at football and then I realised that I liked the training and the muscles better than football."⁸⁰

This opening up of the genetic pool that several respondents of mine referred to can be viewed as an 'objective' factor in the domination of the 'freaky' body ideal. Historically it is one of the effects of the popularization of gym culture and bodybuilding that has taken place from the 1980s onwards, most drastically in the USA and from there on a global plane shaped by the American model. This popularization has entailed increased accessibility to bodybuilding as embodied practice in commercial gyms, institution-based training facilities (schools, the military, police and fire departments, prisons), in the medical field of physical rehabilitation, and as a supplementary regimen to a variety of athletic activities (ranging from soccer and track-and-field to golf). Illustrative of this are the common

⁸⁰Similar accounts were provided by other respondents of mine, and they appear to be confirmed by numerous cases of elite bodybuilders, particularly those coming on the 'scene' from the 1990s onwards, whose trajectories I have known through researching bodybuilding media.

cases of elite bodybuilders of today who discovered their 'natural gift' during the 1990s or 2000s when taking up weight-training to heal an injury or to improve their performance in other sports.

Equally importantly, this popularization resulting in an opening up of the genetic pool has also been concurrent with an increased cultural acceptance of the 'hard body' ideal (Johansson 1998), largely effected through the widespread circulation of its representations in general culture. Even if not identified with the 'extreme,' 'freaky' body aesthetic per se, these representations have functioned as an introduction to the world of bodybuilding for large populations. The globally distributed Hollywood films of the 1980s and 1990s in particular have been crucial in this regard. Illustrative of this are the many elite bodybuilders of the past three decades coming from different parts of the world, including the majority of my respondents, who cite watching Arnold Schwarzenegger and/or other 'celebrity' 'hard bodies' in the movies as the spark of their involvement with the culture.

'The Sport of Bodybuilding: Elite Bodies and Status Hierarchy

In synergy with the qualities discussed so far, the production of bodybuilding as a stratified field of elite performance also appears to involve a hierarchy of status; one which gives form to those self and group identities indispensable to the reproduction of the whole arrangement that brings forth the 'freaky' body. Borrowing the vocabularies of established sports, and in particular individual ones, critical performances are framed in terms of both the trajectory of individual bodybuilders and the larger trajectory of 'the Sport of bodybuilding.' In this universe, the identity of the elite athlete and the quest for recognition constitutes a powerful motivation for 'extreme' bodybuilding. The organised field of competition -including both amateur and professional structures- and the various journeys individuals undertake in it are loaded with and reproduce a particular type of symbolic capital. This is a kind of status that, although connected to other, more informal ones, appears to me to carry a weight of its own. Its construction and recognition as distinct, legitimate, and important, itself largely the effect of a process of acculturation,⁸¹ is steeped in symbols and models of emotional investment of established sports.

⁸¹It is for this reason that winning a high-level contest, or even qualifying for participation in it, means the world to many aspiring and established competition bodybuilders, while, conversely, it means nothing -in the double sense of the word- to people outside the culture.

All my data on the late period lead me to think that the distinguished status and subsequent recognition that bodybuilders (expect to) enjoy through their practice can be a major drive for building the 'freaky' body. In fact, being an elite, and in particular a professional, bodybuilder has become established in the organized culture as a distinct, and revered, identity. Renowned present or former competitors, that is the individuals who pushed the boundaries of performance at different moments in the Sport's history, are viewed as exemplary subjects. The hierarchical character of the Sport of bodybuilding and the way schemes of (self-)perception and aspirations are soaked in it becomes vividly apparent in those instances where 'rising stars' meet the 'legends' at the occasion of competition events with a long history. In a circular mechanics, important events are also vested with a certain distinction, effectively functioning as institutions in their own right. Typically, this symbolic weight, conferred to events and individuals in their interrelation, comes into focus and gets reproduced at the highly visible moments of victory in competition. Such an example is the following excerpt from a video interview, executed in the standardized language of sports journalism: addressing a global community of bodybuilding 'fans' right after his 2011 victory at the second most prestigious professional contest, the Arnold Classic, Branch Warren, the epitome of the bodybuilding 'freak,' medal around his neck and trophy by his feet, states:

Branch Warren: It is still sinking in, you live this and dream it...literally going to bed every night thinking about it, you wake up in the morning thinking about it for years and years, and I finally did it, so...

Reporter: You've joined a great fraternity in the form of a Rich Gaspari, a Vince Taylor, a Flex Wheeler and a Kevin Levrone and some other great champions along the line in the Arnold Classic regime [...]

Branch Warren: I am so humbled to be in the class of all the guys that have won this show...all the greats of the sport have been Arnold Classic victors, I'm very humbled to join that club here tonight.⁸²

Hopes of 'leaving one's mark in the Sport' that are commonly, and it appears to me quite sincerely, expressed by bodybuilders demonstrate how in the field of elite competition bodies assume an existence that outlives their ephemeral nature. The

⁸²<http://mdtv.musculardevelopment.com/contests/11-arnold-classic/3761-arnold-classic-wrap-up-with-branch-warren-jay-cutler-ronnie-coleman-and-more.html>; ac. 06.03.2011.

Sport of bodybuilding becomes that larger frame of reference, an abstract body made up of, addressing, and producing individuals dedicated to the vision of growth stipulated in the culture. An expression and re-generating force of this hierarchical edifice is the institutionalization of a bodybuilding Hall of Fame, yet another convention from the realm of established sports. The inauguration of this formal, public space of recognition was introduced in *FLEX* magazine, the field's publication with the largest international circulation, dedicated since 1983 to 'hardcore' bodybuilding and serving as the official voice of the dominant governing body, the IFBB:

As we approach the millennium and experience projective thoughts that such a milestone engenders, it seems timely to ensure that we do not become so consumed with looking forward that we forget to look back now and again. The truth is that the bodybuilding stars who currently grace the pages of *FLEX* are the product of the cumulative tradition and accomplishments of those who came before. In order to bestow rightful and permanent recognition on those competitors who truly made an impact in establishing, shaping and developing the sport, *FLEX* is proud to announce the creation of Joe Weider's Bodybuilding Hall of Fame.

(*FLEX*, January 1999: 145)

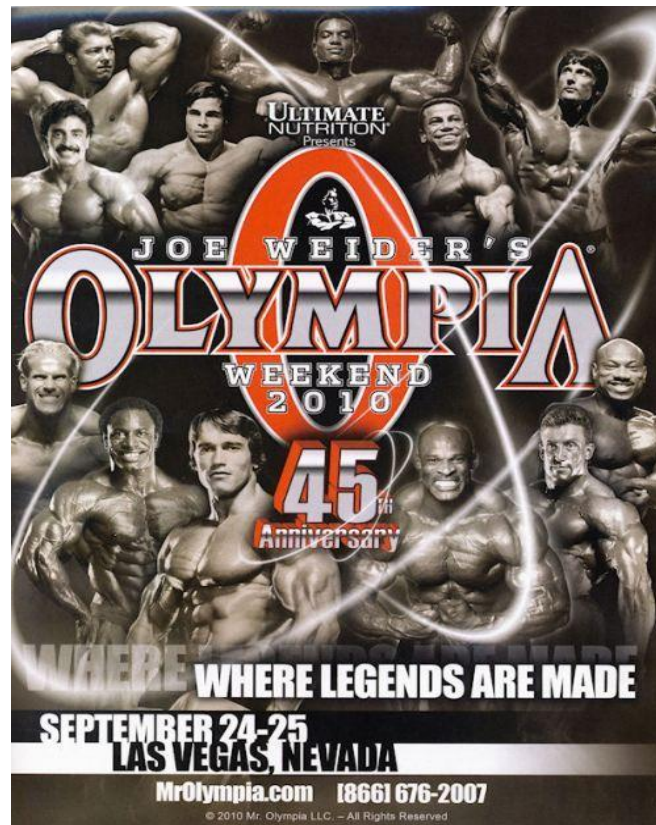


Image 10 Publicity poster for the 45th anniversary of the Mr. Olympia contest⁸³

Depicted together in the image above are all past winners of the prestigious event that, borrowing a term from professional American baseball, is often referred to in dominant bodybuilding culture as 'the Superbowl of Bodybuilding.' During my own fieldwork experience at the 2004 Mr. Olympia contest, I had the opportunity to witness this hierarchical world, with many of the culture's (holy) 'monsters' being physically present and celebrated unto an unbroken line of practice and progress. Image 11 (following page) is illustrative of that occasion, as the culture's unsurpassable icon and then Governor of California emerged in center stage to present the champion and 'super-freak' Ronnie Coleman -who had just made bodybuilding history by tying Schwarzenegger's record of 7 victories- with the trophy. In such group gatherings, replete with symbols and often including some type of memory ritual (Bourdieu 1984), the otherwise abstract body of 'the Sport of bodybuilding' becomes almost tangible. In turn, endlessly represented in images and narratives, such events feed this abstract body that expands in time and space through the culture's media.

⁸³Image source: <http://funkydowntown.com/mr-olympia-2010-results-winners-gallery-photos-history-tribute-video-prediction-contestants/>; ac. 31.10.2010.



Image 11: Arnold Schwarzenegger and Ronnie Coleman on the 2004 Mr. Olympia stage⁸⁴

Trajectories of individuals, communities of practice, and institutions interweave into this unified body of the Sport of bodybuilding and its hierarchy of status, giving it meaning and acquiring meaning from it. That this frame of reference can be instrumentally used by individuals or groups in search of a distinction convertible to other forms of capital inside the culture or a legitimacy in the eyes of the 'outside' world (Dutton 1995; Klein 1993) does not necessarily mean that it cannot also entail a deeply-felt identification, even for the very same individuals or groups. Through my interviews, participant observation and familiarization with bodybuilding culture,⁸⁵ I have come to hold the view that -more often than not- it does, and that is what makes it more resilient and pervasive.

Crucial to this status hierarchy has been the global spread of the bodybuilding

⁸⁴Image source: <http://musclebase.blogspot.com/2009/12/on-stage-at-2004-ifbb-mr-olympia.html>; ac. 05.06.2008.

⁸⁵I think that my long acculturation, close analysis of a vast pool of primary materials over the years, and the new 'unmediated' media providing a more direct and less edited version of the culture's realities, have enabled me to pick up on those details, such as a facial expression, a look, a silence, that help differentiate between strategies, by definition instrumentally used, and beliefs, encompassing one's perception of the world and oneself in it.

'scene.' In a process whose origins I have traced back to the mid-60s, American, and in particular professional, bodybuilding has been at the heart of this gradual formation. What and who 'gets in' its narrative, and how, is often dictated not only by an oblique ideology that I have shown to shape the past from the standpoint of the dominant present, but also by a more crudely ideological victor's history and the intra-field antagonisms behind it. At all times, the weight which the 'Sport of bodybuilding' carries, and by extension the influence it exerts on self/other-perceptions and motivations for practice, grows and extends not only with the passing of time but also with the advent of communication technologies and exchange networks. As a result, even if from a 'mainstream' standpoint it remains culturally isolated at a local or even national level, the 'Sport of bodybuilding' in its 'extreme' direction gets reinforced and reproduced on the basis of a world platform.⁸⁶

Conclusion

Setting off to understand the 'freaky' body celebrated in the dominant, organized bodybuilding culture of the last 30 years, the present chapter has found it to be rendered meaningful, positive, and essentially 'normal' in light of bodybuilding's operation as a field of elite performance. The result of a process discursively produced in terms of bodybuilding 'coming unto its own' (Chapter 5), this field of elite performance has been shown to be based on a series of hierarchies: of technological sophistication, genetic talent, and status. An effort has been made to identify these both at the level of 'objective,' factual processes, and the 'subjective,' yet dominant, meanings they are vested with.

Based on these hierarchies and the way they shape a view of the past, the 'freaky' body is understood inside the dominant bodybuilding culture as a 'better' body. Through a prism that signifies the present as an 'advanced' stage in a process of 'evolution,' the field of elite performance is produced as 'revolutionary,' a type of vanguard of experimentation and achievement. In this model, the search for 'perfection' and development assumes the form of an open-ended project. Unlike other models discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, notions of the 'good' body are not any longer determined by set ideals and 'external' authorities of judgement. Rather, they are brought forth by the creativity of individual practitioners who, through a 'bottom-

⁸⁶The financial aspect of this picture is discussed in Chapter 9.

up' process, generate a 'forward' movement at a social level. This motif of autonomy and self-determination is reflected in the priority given to bodybuilding's 'own' tradition for evaluating excellence.

In examining the current direction of the culture, it becomes apparent that certain rationalities and frames whose tentative articulation I have traced in Chapter 5 in the late 1960s have now become naturalized. The pursuit of muscular development as an end in itself, and the domination of the 'look' as the one and only criterion for the 'good' body, previously non-existent or intensely debated, are two of the facets that account for the emergence of the 'freaky' ideal. Notions of 'breaking boundaries' and the quest for 'the impossible performance' spoken as the 'inherent' meaning of bodybuilding are also recurring motifs in today's dominant accounts.

Despite their 'commonsensical' ring, such outlooks have sprung from and are constantly reproduced by particular arrangements of socio-economic activity. In this instance, the self-referentiality that informs notions of expansion and ever-development is rendered 'logical' and eventually 'necessary' in the culturally and historically-specific environment of organized, and especially professional, competition. By being situated in a system of other established sporting activities, competition bodybuilding is effectively aligned with a wider Western cultural paradigm and a conception of human 'nature' for which elite sport functions as both a matrix and theatre. In this light, the import of notions of a career in bodybuilding and an identity of the elite/professional athlete seems to me to have to some degree shifted from their introduction in the late-60s/early-70s when they mostly figured as a strategy for affirming the 'new' masculinity of 'pure' bodybuilding. Although they still remain gendered as I will show in the next chapter, I would argue that their major function is not any more (primarily) a 'negative' one, that is an instrumental disavowal of suspicions of 'unmanliness,' but a more 'positive' one, emphasizing achievement and upward mobility in a model that carries by now a legitimating tradition of almost 50 years of professional bodybuilding.

The following chapter looks at the 'freak' as a mode of representing a particular model of bodybuilding at the level of embodied practice. Building on the present discussion of the 'freaky,' 'extreme' body ideal at the level of an organized domain of activity, I explore how the logic of 'breaking boundaries' in a 'forward' movement of incessant development comes to apply to the way practitioners set about and understand their own embodied practice as 'individuals' and as 'members' of a community of practice and identity.

Chapter 7

Machine, Animal, Hardcore: 'Freak' as Dominant Approach to the Embodied Practice, Aesthetic of Representation, and Group Identity

Introduction

In the previous chapter I explored prevalent accounts of the trajectory of dominant, organized bodybuilding culture that cast it in terms of an 'evolution' towards 'bigger and better things.' Focusing on the 'freak' at the level of body aesthetic, I have shown how it is conceptualized as a type of sport performance that is recognized as the 'logical' product of a sedimentary, 'forward' movement of achievements. Notions of 'challenging limits' and 'breaking barriers' have emerged as constitutive of a particular idea of 'progress' at a social level. The present chapter examines some of these core notions at the level of the embodied practice.

More specifically, I will look at the 'freak' as representing 'hardcore,' that is a particular model of practising bodybuilding. Having become dominant in the culture from the 1980s onwards, 'hardcore' intertwines and reconciles what may first appear as antithetical elements: On the one hand, I trace an emphasis on willpower, discipline, sacrifice, and rationalization. Identified with the figure and vocabulary of the 'machinic,' these are, I argue, an integral aspect of a performance paradigm dominant in the culture, the origins of which I have traced in Chapter 5. In a hierarchy produced inside the culture on the basis of this paradigm of efficiency and achievement, I trace how elite bodybuilders are framed as exemplary figures as well as how the 'freaky' approach to the practice which they embody makes sense inside the competition model currently dominant in the culture. The cultural and historical specificity of this dominant model comes into relief when contrasted with the distinctly different models of bodybuilding I have discussed previously.

On the other hand, I look at the bodybuilding 'freak' in its emphasis on the physical and authentic experience. In discussing this celebration of the physical which gets represented in terms of a 'positive animality,' I bring attention to the significance of the experience of the embodied practice in the present, in contrast to its much more frequently discussed aspects of deferred gratification. Bringing back

together the 'machinic' and the 'animalistic' elements that are constitutive of the bodybuilding 'freak,' and which I abstracted as separate for the sake of my analysis, I try to show how they inform a particular aesthetic of 'intensity' that has become dominant in the culture.

In the last section of the chapter, I explore how the dominant approach to and experience of the embodied practice, marked by notions of 'seriousness' and 'authenticity,' allows for the articulation of a whole community of lifestyle shaped around a common habitus. Originating primarily in the US context, yet rendered global through media technologies and the spread of specialized products and services, this community of lifestyle brings forth a particular self and group identity. Produced as distinct and distinguishing, this identity is framed directly or indirectly in juxtaposition to an 'outside' which, especially from the 1990s onwards, is construed not only as 'ignorant' but often 'hostile,' too.

For the purposes of the present chapter I have primarily looked at how the dominant model of embodied practice as well as of the community of habitus that forms 'out of' it are imagined. Some of these formulations bear the 'signature' of key figures in the late period of the culture who are considered to embody in an exemplary fashion the 'freak' at the level of the embodied practice. Much of the data on which I build my discussion I have gathered in some of the most influential bodybuilding publications that have been spreading the culture of 'hardcore' on a global scale since the 1980s. In many cases, the representations I am looking at are to be found in contexts that are to a smaller or greater extent commodified. For this reason I have chosen to look at commercial framings of bodybuilding technologies as a primary site for the articulation and visualization of the 'freak' at the level of the dominant model of embodied practice and an ensuing notion of group identity. I have drawn extensively on the promotional literature of 'Animal,' that is a line of bodybuilding technologies which, since its launching in 1983, has been addressing and in the process producing the community of 'hardcore' bodybuilding. I chose to examine it because of its high visibility and its integrated aesthetic that encapsulates core notions regarding the body, embodied practice and lifestyle that have become prevalent in the dominant, organized culture of the past 30 years.

'Freak' as Mental Approach to the Practice: Performance, Sacrifice, Achievement

In 'hardcore' bodybuilding, that is a specific model of bodybuilding emerging in the 1980s and involving both lay and competition practice, both the experience of the embodied practice and the 'appropriate' approach to it are produced in a language of extremes. A distinct 'attitude' or 'mindset' for the practice characterized by absolute focus and application is central to it. In this sense, a 'freak' is the bodybuilder who fully and unconditionally embraces the culture's D-triptych: dedication, determination, discipline (Fussell 1994).

Crucial to this model is a certain glorification of physical discomfort, which has distinctly shaped conventions of representation and vocabularies in the culture, particularly from the 1990s onwards. Training articles appearing in 'hardcore' bodybuilding media are a primary site for the articulation of notions of endurance and pain. A typical example is the following excerpt from an article published in one of the field's internationally circulating and long-standing American magazines. Entitled 'Mega-leg Training: Force Meat onto Your Wheels Fast with This Total Leg Blast,' it carries the experiential 'wisdom' of the elite bodybuilder and writer who authored it:

Heavy weights plus high intensity equal big legs. The formula is so simple, but few trainers seem to grasp it. Maybe the pain of tough leg-training scares people away and discourages them. [...] Because of the sheer volume of muscle in the lower body, the lactic-acid burn feels as if a team of evil elves is sadistically barbecuing your muscles with acetylene torches. Your lungs feel ready to burst, shattering through your ribs like toothpicks as just getting one good breath seems impossible. Your whole body is shaking like a California earthquake and everything in your being is begging to please stop the torture. Yet, if megasize legs are your goal, you keep going.

(Musclemag International, February 2002: 16)

My data suggest that this male pain and extreme effort are rendered meaningful largely in the context of an absolute commitment to one's bodybuilding goals, and are habitually framed as conditions for maximum productivity. The more rigid the self-enforced discipline, the greater the expected results. In the process, various types of physical discomfort are recuperated as conducive to bodybuilding objectives, and are painted as a sort of necessary evils. In this sense, it seems to me

that this instrumental suffering constitutive of 'hardcore' bodybuilding becomes a sine-qua-non in a larger frame of rationalization and efficiency. The figure of the 'machinic' which is often used to speak and image the bodybuilding 'freak' precisely embodies this marriage between scientific application and the subjugation of the body to the will in the relentless pursuit of a goal.

The origins of this model of practicing that is in itself an important part and reflection of the overall 'extreme' direction dominant bodybuilding culture has adopted in the course of the late period, I have traced in Chapter 5 in the search for specialization of performance and maximization of efficiency that arose most clearly in a late-60s/early-70s American context. An early instance of what today is standard bodybuilding vocabulary can be found in a 1969 article where young Arnold Schwarzenegger delineates his training philosophy by employing terms such as 'pulverising' and 'bombing' one's muscles for maximum results (*Muscle Builder/Power*, May 1969: 52). Advising readers on the principle of muscular contraction, his approach is explained as follows: "Because he [Schwarzenegger] concentrates so deeply, and can thereby isolate the muscle for a fuller attack, he can bring the most powerful tension to bear upon it [...] this permits *an all-out attack* and prevents wasted effort and builds muscular definition" (ibid: 50, emphasis in original). Although training enjoys a central place, other related body practices, such as strict dieting, also figure in this celebration of targeted self-discipline and sacrifice. Even though, as I argue further down, the field of elite competition is the high point of this model of embodied practice, lay practice, too, gets framed and experienced in a similar way. In historical perspective, it all sounds very different, even antithetical, to the spirit of early bodybuilders on the subject. Although they, too, placed a premium on rationalization and will power, theirs was a decisively more holistic model of overall health and well-being as I have shown in Chapter 4. Consequently, what they insisted on was moderation in all body practices, and 'sensible fatigue' regarding training more specifically (Treloar 1904: 18).

As I will elaborate further down, at the foundation of this 'freaky' approach to the practice, marked by the whole-hearted pursuit to maximize performance, seems to me to lie a particular model of self-realization. In 'hardcore' bodybuilding and the masculinity it engenders, notions of endurance and sacrifice that bear traces of Christian and/or Romantic traditions of martyrdom and heroism (Moore 1996; Tasker 1995) meet the scientific project of the self (Monaghan 2001). The pain explored here is a self-inflicted one, chosen and applied with scientific precision and

perseverance, elaborated to its most minute detail in a premeditated plan of self-actualization. This is not an external, coercive law but one to which the individual willfully and methodically submits, a law that organizes the body and self, or rather the body *as* self. The language of violence and war regularly used to speak the 'hardcore' model of practice is one of all-out effort and dedication. The figure of the soldier and soldiering precisely conveys gendered ideas of singleness of purpose, tenacity, and an ensuing sense of nobility.⁸⁷

Elite Bodybuilders as Paragons of the 'Hardcore' Approach

On the basis of this dominant model of practice hailed in the culture as distinct and distinguishing, elite bodybuilders transpire as exemplars of application, efficiency, and achievement. In the context of bodybuilding as organized sport, to 'dominate' the competition, one needs first to become a master of dominating oneself; hence a language of aggression that is used to speak equally participation in competition and a corresponding body ethic. Such notions are typically communicated in bodybuilding publications in the format of elite bodybuilders' first-person narratives. The following excerpt is an illustrative example of this: entitled 'The Ideal Way to Massive Legs' and published in the mid-90s in *FLEX* magazine, known as the 'bible of hardcore bodybuilding,' the article features professional champion Andreas Munzer's 'own' account of his 'extreme' approach to the practice:

People have called me mad. They say no sane man would inflict my degree of discipline on himself. Perhaps they're right, but I feel that extremism in the quest of your best is no vice. If I seem to be in the iron grip of Spartan self-denial, it's only because I'm convinced that's what it takes for me to compete with the greatest bodybuilders in the world. The monsters out there today strain the very definitions as to what constitutes a human being, so I simply have to lift myself that much further beyond mortal effort just to stay with them, not only in training but in diet and lifestyle. If I can discipline myself more than the next guy, I will someday beat him.

(*FLEX*, December 1995: 108)

⁸⁷"[...] in the context of other social obligations, the ability to sustain a commitment to diet (which, for bodybuilders, entails regular activity) may figure in the 'heroisation' of every day life, which is simultaneously a process of 'masculinisation'" (Featherstone 1992, cited in Monaghan 2001: 61).

In the dominant bodybuilding culture's media, the extreme self-discipline and sacrifice characteristic of the 'freaky' approach to the practice are consistently situated in light of individual bodybuilders' trajectories in organized competition. What, thus, might look like folly to an 'outsider' appears in the eyes of 'insiders' as a marker of excellence. Certain high-profile bodybuilders become important reference figures in the culture precisely on the grounds of their approach to the practice. 6-time Mr. Olympia champion Dorian Yates is one of them, having inaugurated in the early 1990s what is referred to in dominant bodybuilding culture as the 'Era of the Freak.' The accolade is not only attributed to the unprecedented body aesthetic he presented to the bodybuilding world but –equally importantly- to his approach to the practice. Although long retired, he remains to this day the epitome of the 'freak' as a frame of mind, having set about the endeavor with a single-mindedness that placed him in a 'league of his own.'⁸⁸ Reporting on Yates' 1994 Mr. Olympia victory, *FLEX* magazine's senior writer Peter McGough lays out page after page the extraordinary suffering this extraordinary athlete had been through the year leading to the competition, in preparation for it:

"Blood-ee hell!" Snarled Dorian Yates through clenched teeth, as he bent over a chair and grimaced into the dressing-room mirror. With 40 minutes to go before the prejudging, his stomach felt like it contained a tennis ball that was growing larger by the minute [...] In March he had torn a ligament that impinged on the rotator cuff in his left shoulder joint. [...] In April, still in the throes of sorting out his shoulder injury, Yates tore the vastus muscle in his left thigh and couldn't train legs for the next five weeks [...] And then on July 12, less than nine weeks before the Mr. Olympia in Atlanta, just as Yates thought he'd overcome the worst year of his training life, a searing pain shot up his arm as he repped out on bent rows with 405 pounds. Mr. Olympia had torn his left biceps muscle [...]

Mid-to-late July was the watershed point for Dorian Yates. Advisers told him he was still good enough to win the title with a damaged arm but the unique mentality of Dorian Yates felt differently. For this bodybuilding one-off, it is

⁸⁸This has been recognised and reproduced in both lay accounts as well as business-oriented framings of Dorian Yates, such as the advertisement for the bodybuilding nutritional supplement below. Next to a photo of Yates training at full intensity, the caption reads 'If you think he's frightening on stage, you should see him in the gym,' followed by the product description:

When Dorian Yates walks into the gym, he is concerned with only one thing- being an even bigger Mr. Olympia in '97 than he was the last four times. He doesn't care if his clothes don't match, or his hair isn't combed. He just wants to be sure he's training with enough intensity to turn 255 lbs of quality body mass into 280 lbs by September 21, 1996. It's for monsters like Dorian that we've created Creatine EFX.

(*FLEX*, October 1996: 2-3)

not good enough just to be able to win. Never mind that the consensus was that he already had one hand on the \$100.000 first-place check, he had to be *better!* [...] Throughout his bodybuilding career Dorian Yates had been his own nemesis, constantly goading himself to higher levels. Now he asked himself, "Are you a champion?"

(*FLEX*, January 1995: 136, emphasis in original)

Especially with the advent of the Web and technologies for ongoing 'coverage' of developments (such as photos, videos, official reports, and informal discussions in bodybuilding magazine websites, individual blogs, and fora), bodybuilders' journeys of preparation for competition events have become central spaces where 'extreme' practice and effort get visualized and narrativized. In the process, elite bodybuilders are produced as a specific kind of person, the 'uncommon' men who 'naturally' and unconditionally embrace challenges and the spirit of fierce competition. Adding, thus, another dimension to the hierarchical constitution of a field of elite practice discussed in the previous chapter, the exemplary 'freaks' of the culture are portrayed as 'superior' at the level of body ethic.

The Dominant Model of Competition as Matrix and Theater of Extreme Effort

Although essentialized at the level of 'human nature' (Chapter 6) and of 'individual personality' (section above), the currently dominant model of competition that fosters the instrumental, 'extreme' approach to the practice as logical and necessary is a very specific one. At its core lies a winning ethos that typically manifests itself in a language of war used to speak bodybuilding competition: 'invading' (a contest); 'doing (serious) damage;' 'destroying,' 'obliterating,' 'dominating,' 'pulverising' or 'wiping out' the competition are recurring motifs that appear aligned with a larger sport competition discourse that, even in more mainstream sporting activities, regularly employs similar vocabularies (Jansen and Sabo 1994; Messner, Dunbar, and Hunt 2000). It is not by accident that this language of competition-as-war first emerges in the late-1960/early-1970s in the USA 'scene,' the place and period where, as demonstrated in Chapter 5, professional competition

is constructed as the essence and future of 'pure' bodybuilding.⁸⁹ In effect, the exaltation of earnestness and extreme effort appears to me to be an important aspect of building the 'freak' not only as a body aesthetic but also as an aesthetic of representation reflective of the dominant model of embodied practice.

This aesthetic of representation can be clearly contrasted to the early, formative period of the bodybuilding spectacle, discussed in Chapter 4, where emphasis was placed on not only the production but also (re)presentation of the 'natural' body, reflected in a comportment characterised by 'grace' and subtleness. A similar argument has been made for the subsequent middle period (1940s-1970s) by John Fair (2006); in his examination of the amateur competition model upheld in Europe by the National British Bodybuilding Association (NABBA), Fair (2006) brings attention to the premium placed on an attitude of 'easiness,' emphasising gentlemanly participation instead of winning, embodied in an aesthetic of (re-)presentation marked by the non-laboured and non-instrumental. Such a historical perspective has allowed me to recognise that the 'freak' of the past 30 years has arisen from and is rendered meaningful in the context of a dominant model of competition that is crystallized in professional bodybuilding. Identified with tunnel vision, extreme measures, and a relentless drive to win, it is a dominant aesthetic that I have observed to be part and parcel of what renders bodybuilding 'incomprehensible,' 'grotesque' and/or 'ridiculous' to those unfamiliar with the culture.

A close look at what have become standardised nuances in the presentation of the 'extreme' body on the competition stage reveals that they are precisely designed to blatantly bring attention to the accomplishment: the ritualistically slow assumption of body poses; the pointing to, slapping, and/or touching of individual body-parts to highlight their outstanding development;⁹⁰ the customised choreography to music

⁸⁹An early instance of this is the following reporting on the 1969 Mr. Olympia:

...I learned that Arnold Schwarzenegger definitely planned to compete in both the Mr. Universe and Mr. Olympia events. By all accounts, he looked plain outta this sphere and would wipe out all competition [...] The 1969 IFBB Mr. Olympia contest will go down in history as one of the most dramatic physique battles of all time [...] You can decide for yourself when you read a blow-by-blow account in next month's issue.

(*Muscle Builder/Power*, March 1970: 27, 31)

⁹⁰Recollecting his career as a competition bodybuilder in the early 1970s, Schwarzenegger admits he tried to attract extra attention to his best-developed body-part by pretending he wiped an imaginary drop of sweat off his chest while on stage (*Musclemag International*, June 1996: 38). It seems that back then, bringing attention in an overt, targeted way had to be done as a trick, i.e. bringing attention

and narration that situate a competitor's performance in their personal trajectory of 'success' or 'redemption;' facial expressions conveying intensity and effort; and the ostentatiousness with which one's body is presented are all conventions of representation largely originating in the USA-based professional circuit and soon trickle down to bodybuilding stages around the world.⁹¹

At the level of formal displays of the built body, conventions of representation such as those mentioned above have been interpreted by previous works in terms of a 'show of control' (Fussell 1991),⁹² or a performance of hyper-masculinity in an attempt to counteract the problematics of the objectification of the male body to the gaze (White and Gillett 1994: 19-39) and/or the perception of bodybuilding as frivolous, effete, or part of gay culture (Simpson 1994).⁹³ These interpretations can be complemented, I propose, with a reading that emphasizes the showcasing of extreme effort as the core ingredient in a profile of individual distinction specific to the culture. In this sense, the 'freak' as a performance of the self involves a theatrics of accomplishment that is recognized as such by a learned gaze. In his autobiography *Brothers of Iron* (2006), Joe Weider, the figure who has had a major influence on how 'pure' bodybuilding got shaped from the 1970s onwards, insists on the on-stage performance of the trajectory of dedication the bodybuilders have undergone, for the audience to unmistakably see. In live displays of the built body, therefore, effort and commitment become a spectacle in their own right:

without letting it show as such.

⁹¹To notice this pattern, one needs only browse the Web for random footage of bodybuilding competitions held across the globe. The influence of the USA-based, professional 'scene' becomes particularly evident in the cases of amateur bodybuilders who adopt these conventions of presenting the 'freaky' body without actually coming anywhere close to physically embodying it.

⁹²Of the fantasy of the controlled body that he understands as integral to the performance of bodybuilders in organized competition, Fussell (1991: 194) writes that "[u]p on the high wire, the trapeze artist frantically waves his arms to generate a feeling of danger. But on the dais, the goal is to generate safety, security. The bodybuilder projects a feeling of utter self-control. The winner in the free-posing round is not simply the man with the best body, but the builder most adept at selling the fantasy."

⁹³Alan Klein (1993: 247-248) understands the way bodybuilders generally carry themselves in the world, "their presentation of self as literal and metaphorical posturing," as marked by a grandiose, attention-calling masculinity that is based on a fundamental insecurity and fear of looking small and insignificant.

In bodybuilding, posing is as real as can be [...] I've always told my guys that it's fine to have fun [during the show], but the poses must be serious to show the seriousness of commitment to bodybuilding. A competitor should look like he's working hard, straining, grunting, to reflect the effort that it took to build his muscles.

(Ben and Joe Weider 2006: 175-176)

Considering that in the culture's late period the vast majority of spectators of live displays have been bodybuilding practitioners themselves, I argue that this theatrics addresses an audience of 'insiders' that can 'properly' appreciate it on the basis of not only their overall familiarisation with the culture's tradition and conventions but also their own experience of the practice.⁹⁴ Thus, discourses such as those quoted above directly or indirectly frame this aesthetic of representation with reference to a specialized audience and community of embodied practice that is not only in the position to 'understand' it but 'demands' it as well. Thus, in its capacity as a visual code that remains closed and even repulsive to 'outsiders,' the 'freak' transpires as another manifestation of a dominant paradigm that has come to operate on the basis of 'its own' world of references and hierarchies.

Celebrating the Physical and Authentic Experience: 'Freak' as Positive Animality

So far in this chapter I have discussed the 'freak' as a particular approach to the practice and its aesthetic of representation founded on notions of dedication, sacrifice, and focus, and represented through the 'machinic.' Equally constitutive of the 'freak' I have found to be a celebration of the physical, imagined and imaged in terms of the 'animalistic.' In much of the research that touches on notions of animality in late-modern bodybuilding culture, the interpretative prism adopted focuses on how such notions are implicated in constructions of sex/gender difference based on biological binarisms, i.e. on a model that can be traced back to the larger 'scientific' search of the 'fundamental' self based on a hormone-based paradigm

⁹⁴A telling instance of this is the response given by veteran competitor and bodybuilding legend Robby Robinson when asked about the bodybuilder whose physique he most admires: "Dorian Yates [...] when I look at Dorian's physique, I see *hard work*, period" (*FLEX*, January 1995: 256, emphasis in original).

(Hoberman 2005). Holmlund (1997), among others, argues that in both male and female dominant bodybuilding culture a strictly bipolar system is in operation, one that (re)produces gender-as-nature despite the obvious, literal construction of the gendered self. In a similar spirit, Fussell (1994) interprets the currency of notions of animality in male bodybuilding culture as a longing for a return to a more 'basic,' 'primordial' gender stratification.

What interests me at this point in my discussion is how a notion of 'positive animality' inscribed in the 'freak' is used in dominant bodybuilding culture to speak the 'hardcore' embodied experience. Significantly, this animality is not of an 'irrational,' 'self-destructive,' 'impulsive,' 'counterproductive' kind. On the contrary, it is represented as a revered 'force of nature,' magnified through the embodied practice and made to serve the methodical, all-encompassing project of the self that is 'hardcore' bodybuilding. To the extent, thus, that the hormonal ultimately becomes a resource harnessed for performance (Hoberman 2005), the 'animalistic' I focus on here is not antithetical to but compatible with, and even enabling, the 'machinic.'

Important in this extolling of the physical is a sense of 'intense,' 'authentic' experience. Training becomes here central again; this time, though, not only as the axis of the rational project of self-development, but also as an experience in its own right. The literature on bodybuilding typically focuses on the aspects of deferred gratification, that is the instrumental undergoing of extreme practices in expectation of results that will manifest themselves at another stage. Complementing this perspective, I would like to bring attention to the 'here-and-now' dimension of the extreme embodied practice, the experience in-the-present that seems to me to be vested with a significance of its own in the culture's discourses. In this context, the freak-as-animal is a motif mobilized to frame 'extreme' sensation that can verge on a kind of self-transcendence effected through taking one's body 'to the limit.' Imagined in terms of the 'dynamic,' the 'raw,' the 'boundless,' and the 'uncontainable,' this animality zeroes in on a sense of 'immediate,' 'extraordinary,' 'authentic' experience. In the language of the body, the bodybuilding 'freak' gets directly or indirectly contrasted to the 'lethargic,' the 'stagnant,' the 'deteriorating,' and/or the 'self-limiting' that is often typified in the 'fat,' 'unfit,' and/or 'lazy' body. Ultimately, the 'animalistic' as a vehicle for framing intense experience translates into an existence of 'extraordinariness,' juxtaposed to one of 'uneventfulness' and 'mediocrity.'

The Aesthetic of 'Intensity:' Interweaving the 'Machinic' and the 'Animalistic'

As already pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, it is largely through a process of abstraction that I have separated the 'machinic' from the 'animalistic' for the purposes of my discussion. In effect, my claim is that they are equally constitutive of the 'freak' as a particular approach to and experience of the 'hardcore' embodied practice. One of the principal sites where the 'machinic' and the 'animalistic' can be appreciated in their synergy is what I have identified as an aesthetic of 'intensity' that is prevalent in the culture. At the intersection of the 'civilized' body (Elias 1978, cited in Monaghan 2001: 158) and the 'primal' body, this aesthetic of representation employed to imagine the bodybuilding 'freak' plays with and reconciles notions of the rational and the instinctual, the explosive and the purposeful, in and out of control.

My archival research shows that the aesthetic and discourse of 'intensity' have become distinctly prominent from the mid-1980s onwards (as evidenced from covers and articles regularly featured in bodybuilding publications of the last 30 years). Its commodification, intensified from the 2000s to the present, demonstrates and reproduces its currency. Not only has the promotion of long-existing types of commodities been infused with this aesthetic, but new ones emerge that are defined exclusively by it. More specifically, a distinct variety of technologies that have come to enjoy high visibility in the bodybuilding industry in the past decade, that is food supplements to be consumed in preparation for physical exercise, are framed precisely in those terms: enabling the practitioner/consumer to 'take it to the limit' and achieve 'maximum intensity' during training.

Advertisements for bodybuilding technologies are a primary space for visualizing the hybrid of the hormonal and the performing that is the 'freak' at the level of embodied practice. In what has practically become a convention of representation, a distinct pool of visuals, words, and sounds is used to communicate the core concepts. Typically, black&white or grim colours denote inwardness, regimentation, and mental discipline; red or fiery colours denote instinct, passion, eruption. A variety of machines, natural elements, and the inside of the body appear as recurrent motifs in this audiovisual language. So does war, used to convey intense experience and doggedness. Various commodities are, thus, marketed as 'weapons' in the bodybuilder's 'arsenal,' enabling one to push past one's limits during every single workout, all in light of a 'serious' approach to the practice. The following is an

example of the vocabularies and notions that are currently the rule rather than the exception in framing bodybuilding technologies. Promoting the pre-workout food supplement 'Rage' on the official website of the Animal line of 'hardcore' bodybuilding technologies, instrumental effort in pursuit of a larger objective, extraordinary experience in-the-moment, and a sense of distinction are all painted with one and the same stroke:

Like I've said before Rage is like a fucking shot of Jack, not a wine cooler. It is meant to be taken back straight, no chaser. It's got some kick and a little burn. It doesn't taste like fucking candy. It is an experience. It wakes you up just sniffing it, feeling the buzz as it assails your taste buds. My Pops once noted that I'd "eat the ass off a rhinoceros if I thought it would get me big", so maybe I make for a bad character witness, but I dig potent Orange Juiced jolt of Animal Rage. I mix mine with even less than the recommended dose of 4 ounces, going down to around 3 oz. This is one big swig, down the hatch and it is ON. Takes about a half a second flat.⁹⁵ [...]

When your training feels like it is a matter of life or death —those are the days for which Animal Rage was made.

Rage. It's not a subtle word. There is nothing half-hearted or half-ass about such a raw, unadulterated flood of anger channelled at an unfortunate target. Luckily for the civilized world around us, our Rage is ingested voluntarily before our rage is splattered on the weight room floor. Animal Rage was developed as a supplemental hair trigger for this transformational emotion, as the secret weapon of choice when it comes time to bring the fire. The new standard for training intensity, yesterday's good enough ain't cutting it anymore. Animal Rage is here. The past is preworkout prologue and the proof is in the pain.⁹⁶

The genre of bodybuilding training photography is another primary space for visualizing the aesthetic of 'intensity.' Here, too, a particular relation to the practice characterised by absolute commitment and extreme bodily experience informs the visual syntax of the bodybuilding 'freak.' In fact, tracing the emergence and development of the aesthetic of 'intensity' in bodybuilding photography provides clues as to a gradual insular 'turn' that dominant bodybuilding culture has taken in the course of the late period. In his account of the genre's development below, the icon of 'hardcore' Dorian Yates essentially juxtaposes on the one hand, an earlier mode of (re)presenting the built body as 'slick,' 'cool' and 'in,' typical of the late-1970s and 1980s when bodybuilding enjoyed unprecedented popularity and was actively

⁹⁵http://animalpak.com/html/article_details.cfm?ID=548; ac. 25.06.2011.

⁹⁶http://animalpak.com/html/article_details.cfm?ID=529; ac. 25.06.2011.

promoted to wider, 'mainstream' audiences; and, on the other hand, a subsequent more 'serious' mode from early/mid-1990s onwards that seems to address an audience of 'insiders:'

Dorian Yates: Some black and white pictures appeared in a magazine of me using Hammer Strength machines and they were popular; fans loved 'em 'cause they were real workout photos, which is something I insisted on with photographers. I didn't want to do all that posed shit with light weights and water sprayed on me wearing a pair of sunglasses. I thought it was bullshit. Nobody trains like that!

Interviewer: You just answered one of my next questions!

Dorian Yates (laughing): I think I had a major influence on the way bodybuilding photography went. Up to that point you had to pose, have the lights all there, spray on some sweat, oil up and all that kind of stuff. I really didn't want to do that. I said, "Come on, let's take some workout photos. I don't even need to take my shirt off. People want to see that inspirational moment of effort." The photographers were reluctant at first. I think Chris Lund was the first to do it, and now if you look at everyone's photographs they're all pretty hardcore workout photos.⁹⁷

⁹⁷[http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:YfXgqQTIsXMJ:www.tmuscle.com/free_online_article/sports_body_training_performance_interviews/dorian_yates_interview+dorian+yates+black+and+white+hammer+rowing&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk; ac. 21.07.2010.](http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:YfXgqQTIsXMJ:www.tmuscle.com/free_online_article/sports_body_training_performance_interviews/dorian_yates_interview+dorian+yates+black+and+white+hammer+rowing&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk; ac. 21.07.2010)



Image 12 Dorian Yates training photo at the 'Mecca of Bodybuilding,' Gold's Gym, Venice, California in the early-1990s⁹⁸

The above a standard example of the aesthetic of 'intensity' characteristic of 'hardcore' bodybuilding photography that has become prevalent in the past 20 years. Shot in black and white, Dorian Yates is depicted training at full intensity, his face contorted with exertion, his whole being 'taken to the limit.' On the left, overlooking the process, is professional bodybuilding champion, Mike Mentzer. Both are well-known in the culture for subscribing to the philosophy of exercising at maximum intensities for improved efficiency of performance. Here, extreme effort becomes a spectacle in its own right.

Under the Sign of 'Hardcore:' Framing A Community of 'Serious' Practice and Identity

Having established some of the core aspects of the dominant model of embodied practice and the way these are represented in the figure of the 'freak,' I will

⁹⁸Image source: <http://members.fortunecity.com/donjeon/kckassn.htm>; ac. 09.07. 2010.

now turn to how they are implicated in producing a certain group identity. For the latter, the notion of a shared habitus of 'hardcore' bodybuilding appears as the recurring denominator. The endless references to 'hardcore' in the past 30 years and the debates centring on defining what it 'really' means reveal the significance and status the concept has come to enjoy in the culture. The following is an excerpt from the 'Blood and Guts' column of Dorian Yates in *Muscular Development* magazine; the figure that personifies 'extreme' bodybuilding as few others in today's bodybuilding public's consciousness devotes in this particular case his column entirely to the question 'What Does *Hardcore* Really Mean?'

Hardcore is about challenging yourself. If you push yourself to the limit every time you train and are determined to get the best of your workouts, it doesn't matter how big or small you are –you're hardcore. [...]

The most important factor in where you train is whether the majority of members are there to train seriously. There's a certain vibe you feel in a place like that. Powerhouse Gym in Long Island, NY is a perfect example. You have professional athletes as well as plenty of average folks, but everyone is in the gym to work hard and get results [...] Any facility can be considered hardcore as long as it has a large group of serious trainers and hard training is encouraged rather than frowned on [...]

(*Muscular Development*, June 2009: 276-278)

This notion of 'seriousness' seems to me to be the connective tissue between the various strata of the 'hardcore' continuum of practice and identity that includes lay and elite practitioners. In effect, 'seriousness' transpires as the organizing principle for a hierarchy of distinction and worth particular to the culture. It is in this spirit that John Romano, former senior editor of *Muscular Development* magazine, co-founder of bodybuilding multi-media website www.RXMuscle.com, and a principal respondent of mine,⁹⁹ writes in his regular column:

It is said that in any community only a few do the really crucial work. In our world, that work takes place in the gym. Not just any gym, mind you. In fact, the word "gym" has been perverted over time into something dreadful. Cavernous glass and chrome enclaves richly appointed with carpeting, decorative finishes, and optioned with such accoutrements as juice

⁹⁹John is introduced more fully in Chapter 9 where his contribution becomes central to the discussion.

bars, salons, child care, pilates studios, and spa services; sporting such names as Bally's, 24 Hour Fitness, LA Fitness, Sports Club LA, Equinox, and the like, are not "gyms" even though they have a room with some free weights, weight machines and dumbbells. These are not gyms; these are "health clubs." Typically, bodybuilders - the aforementioned few in our community doing the crucial work - do that work in a gym, not a health club. As such, the work being done in a gym - a real gym - is pretty serious stuff. [...]

Now, I am by no means considering myself one of the few in our community. However, to me, my work is no less crucial and I set about doing that work with every bit of the ferocity and seriousness of any rising amateur or top level professional. I'm in the gym to get my training done, do my cardio, and get out of there so I can go home and eat. No socializing, talking, fucking around or trying to make friends. When I'm training I have my iPod on, my beanie pulled down nearly over my eyes like a Vato, and I focus on what I'm doing with the rest of the world tuned out.¹⁰⁰

As evidenced in the opinions of prominent figures in the culture quoted above, the physical spaces of training become fundamental in framing a sense of an 'inside.' 'Hardcore' gyms emerge, thus, as a distinct type of facility catering to the 'extreme' mind-frame and experience. Those amongst them identified with famous eras of elite bodybuilding and/or individual icons of the sport, such as East Coast's Gold's Gym in Venice, California, and West Coast's Powerhouse Gym in Syosset, NY, become focal points of the culture (Bourdieu 1984). Through their endless, internationally circulated representations in bodybuilding media, geometrically expanded in the past 20 years with the Web, such places have effectively emerged as global points of reference for 'serious' practitioners (Klein 1993; Moore 1996).¹⁰¹

Frequently, the framing, commercial or otherwise, of 'hardcore' bodybuilding gyms builds on a rhetoric of 'anti-conformism' and 'authenticity.' Venerated as distinct and distinguishing, such spaces, and by extension the culture they foster and represent, are at times produced in opposition to other body/exercise cultures (such as 'fitness' and 'well-being') or to 'lesser' spaces and practitioners who only engage with bodybuilding in a 'compromised,' 'limited' way. Such oppositions, and the self/group-definition they engender, are rendered meaningful in light of the popularization of physical exercise, and weight-training more specifically, from the 1980s onwards, giving rise to issues of rarity and distinction (Bourdieu 1984).¹⁰² In

¹⁰⁰<http://rxmuscle.com/articles/romanos-rage/1487-water-fountain-hogs.html>; ac. 31.05.2010.

¹⁰¹Well-known bodybuilding websites often feature listings of 'real' bodybuilding gyms nationally and internationally, intended as a practical guide for 'hardcore' practitioners.

¹⁰²Although I have not researched this in depth, it would be plausible to suggest that part of the

its commodified aspects, 'hardcore' can, thus, be viewed as one amongst a variety of highly differentiated cultural products and services addressing and producing a specific community of practice in the wider system of exercise and lifestyle.¹⁰³

More often though, the authenticity and extraordinariness of the 'inside' are framed against a clear-cut 'outside' that is perceived as ignorant, judgmental and/or indifferent. 'Mainstream' society is portrayed, and in the process constituted, as that 'outside' which acquires substance precisely through its juxtaposition to the world of 'hardcore' bodybuilding, be it in its organized form ('the Sport') or in its capacity as what Monaghan (2001), following Giddens (1991), terms a 'radical lifestyle choice.' Here, the bodybuilding 'freak' is defined and celebrated as a marker of positive distinction in a constant, direct or indirect, opposition to this 'outside' that is unable to grasp the meaning of it all, or is even outright hostile to it.

In its American variety, this framing of the 'freak' rests on notions of the few and select purposeful individuals, borrowing heavily from the myth of the loner and its masculinity defined by an image of man "controlling his environment [...] expected to prove himself not by being part of society but by being untouched by it, soaring above it [...] He is to be in the driver's seat, the king of the road [...] He's a man because he won't be stopped" (Faludi 2000: 10). Typifying precisely this framing are the texts I quote below from the promotional literature of Animal. With an international reputation and distribution, Animal is a line of 'hardcore' bodybuilding supplements by American company Universal Nutrition.¹⁰⁴ Distinctly

reaction to the 'mainstreaming' of gym culture that is constitutive of 'hardcore' bodybuilding may be the mixed-gender aspect of the former which was intensively promoted in the bodybuilding and fitness industry of the 1980s. Although 'hardcore' gyms are open to women practitioners as well, the majority of practitioners are men. Irrespective of their sex, those who frequent such spaces abide by a body ethic that, in its glorification of effort, 'seriousness,' and performance can be described as 'masculine.'

¹⁰³Evidence of that is the fact that major 'hardcore' bodybuilding magazines are for some publishers one among many ventures of theirs in the market of sports/exercise/lifestyle publications. Similarly, some companies of food supplements devote specific lines of products and/or differentiated advertising strategies for a 'hardcore' bodybuilding consumer base.

¹⁰⁴In existence since 1977, Universal Nutrition is a highly recognisable company in the culture. Its status is reflected in its presence in the industry (e.g. serving as major sponsor for bodybuilding competitions) and the global reach of its products (nowadays boasting official distributors in 105 different countries). It was in fact one of the first companies whose products -which I had regularly seen advertised in the American bodybuilding magazines distributed in Greece- I came across physically, available at the gym I attended in Athens in 1996, and consumed after the 'learned'

dramatic and integrated, the imagery and concepts employed crystallize some of the core pillars for producing a community of practice and identity. The bodybuilders who, in endorsing the line's products, constitute its 'face,' are for the most part neither beginners nor established figures but 'up-and-coming' competitors. In this sense, they stand in the middle of the 'hardcore' continuum, connecting the two ends of an unbroken line of practice and practitioners. Providing an 'inside,' intimate look into their thoughts and trajectories, and cultivating a sense of constant contact with the 'grassroots' global community of 'hardcore,' on-line 'diaries' of the individual sponsored bodybuilders are featured on the Animal website. In his 'Life is a Freak Show' diary, sponsored bodybuilder 'Machine' writes:

I will tell you that one of the most disturbing and distracting things you will face is life. We all know life is hard all over. That is not what I mean. I mean having relationships with 'normal people.' How many times have you felt like a stranger at your own dinner table? How many times have they looked at you like a lost cause? It's hard for people to cope with and understand our lives and the way we live them. "But why?" Ever heard that one? "Why do you want to look like that?" "Why do you want to get all big and veiny?" Or "All you do is work out -you don't even get paid for it." They just don't get it and every time you stop to address their assertions, you have allowed them to distract you.¹⁰⁵

In many instances, the bond forged out of the 'extreme,' 'authentic,' physical experience and commitment is produced as 'above and beyond' any other 'outside' hierarchies and identifications. The latter, whether explicitly referred to or implied, are –in comparison to the 'hardcore' habitus- characterized by their fleetingness, superficiality, other-imposition, easiness and comfort, or lack of a deeper significance, such as jobs, relationships, and/or mere hobbies. In contrast to those, the 'hardcore' habitus gets painted as that space where the 'serious' practitioner as the self-realizing individual amidst others of his kind, creates himself with violence, into a world of one's own making, outside and parallel to the 'ordinary' world of conformity, restrictions, uneventful repetition, alienation, the mundane, other-governed and other-oriented.

In bodybuilding's universe of a shared embodied experience and vision of personal growth, the logic and practice of incessant repetition and discipline are

recommendation of the gym's trainers.

¹⁰⁵http://www.animalpak.com/html/article_print.cfm?ID=27; ac. 29.06.09.

engulfed in a language of creative violence and drive; because freely chosen, they are appreciated as liberating, and utterly outside the understanding of those foreign to this world.¹⁰⁶ In 'The 24/7 Athlete' entry of his 'Diary of a Freak,' sponsored bodybuilder of Animal, G. Diesel, writes:

No athletic pursuit in this world requires a comparable sort of single-minded focus. Bodybuilding is not a mere physical pastime. It is a way of life. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, the bodybuilder pursues excellence. [...] Every meal and every training session is a battle of will, an all out struggle for supremacy against the most daunting of all foes. Yourself [...] Day in and day out the bodybuilder must stalk improvement. There will be no repose and no sabbatical. [...]

Not everyone is cut out for this *****. If you're still with me, chances are you have already made your choice. You are one of the few, the dedicated, the demented [...] Don't think that effort goes unnoticed, Animal. Where the average hockey player can blend into the rest of society when out among the public, the bodybuilder wears his uniform out into the world every single day. Beyond the sneers of the jealous and the misinformed, above the drug accusers and the naysayers, the bodybuilder stands proud for he knows how few could ever walk in his shoes.¹⁰⁷

In discourses such as those I have drawn upon above, belonging to the community of 'hardcore' emerges as the defining matrix of the person's identity. While Bauman defines volatility as one of the characteristics of identities in liquid modernity (2000: 178), and although the lived realities of bodybuilding practitioners demonstrate that changing variables -such as resources, shifting priorities, levels of immersion to and investment in the culture- account for different levels of engagement with the practice and culture over time, their discursive construction speaks the opposite: not only is 'hardcore' bodybuilding produced as a fully-fledged identity and lifestyle, experienced practically or imaginedly in the context of a whole community of practitioners, but one that stands out as 'real,' permanent, carved on the body and in the soul, defining and definitive.

Along a formula whose early, tentative assemblage I have traced in Chapter 5 in the late- 60s/early-70s, the articulation of this identity framed around 'pure' bodybuilding takes place in both normative and self-referential terms. In the first

¹⁰⁶In its use of war metaphors, the 'hardcore' rhetoric can be seen as part of a larger modern tradition that celebrates the 'new' man as a being brought to life by the immediate, authentic, 'extreme' experience of warfare, typically defined against the 'tameness' of ordinary, civilian life (Herf 1986).

¹⁰⁷http://www.animalpak.com/html/article_details.cfm?section=livin&id=215; ac. 24.07.2006.

case, notions of strength, hard work, honour, pride, and integrity are mobilized in speaking of 'real' men in a world of 'mediocrity' and 'compromise.' In the second case, the organizing principle is 'free choice,' with 'seriousness' and 'commitment' coming to resemble more of a fetish. As the content of those terms gets relegated to secondary significance, their value becomes tautological. Here, the identity of lifestyle they represent assumes its legitimacy by being placed directly or indirectly amidst a system of other such freely chosen identities (Bourdieu 1984).

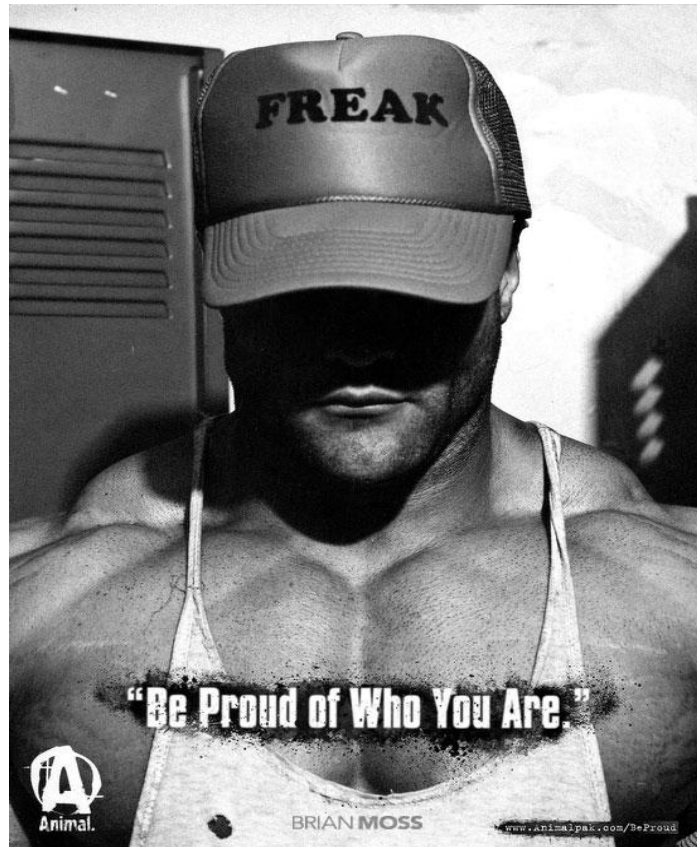


Image 13 Promotional material for the Animal line of 'hardcore' bodybuilding technologies

The image above is illustrative of the iconography of Animal and its 'plain' aesthetic. With the familiar setting of the gym locker room as background, and the face mostly covered in the shadow, the sight of (merely a part of) the body is, for those who 'know how to look,' enough to 'know' the person. Here, the 'freaky' body becomes a spectacle of self, properly appreciated by an 'insider's' gaze. In speaking of, addressing and in the process producing the 'hardcore' continuum, promotional literature such as that of the Animal series involves in direct and indirect ways the

reader as existing or potential member of a world-wide community. The following is an excerpt from the text that accompanies the image above. The 'few and select,' isolated in the context of a local or national 'mainstream' society, become a 'legion' on a global platform.

You don't follow trends or the pack. You are impervious to peer pressure or the will of another. You are the lone warrior on his own personal journey. The rugged individualist marching to the beat of a drum only you can hear [...] You take pride in being one of a rare breed. You are Animal to your core. Be proud of who you are.

Though you are one of a kind, you are not alone. On this spinning globe there is a legion of like-minded soldiers who see the world through the same prism. The Animal family [...] is a proud and distinguished tribe, growing in size and stature, both body and mind, each and every day.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

Moving on from the previous chapter's discussion of the 'freaky' body aesthetic as a 'logical' step in dominant bodybuilding culture's trajectory of continuous 'progress,' the present chapter has further explored the notion of 'breaking boundaries' at the level of the embodied practice. Looking at the 'freak' as a figure that represents the dominant, 'hardcore' model of practising bodybuilding, I have tried to think the streams that are inscribed in it. On the one hand, I have found a relation to the practice and the body marked by the demands of rationalization and efficiency, and framed in a particular 'attitude' of absolute commitment and application represented in terms of the 'machinic.' On the other hand, I have identified a celebration of the physical as a site of authenticity and experience-in-the-present; represented in terms of the 'animalistic,' this exaltation of the 'hormonal,' 'primal' body is not antithetical to but enabling 'hardcore' bodybuilding as an all-consuming project of the self (Monaghan 2001).

The extreme effort constitutive of 'hardcore' bodybuilding and dramatized in what I have identified as an aesthetic of 'intensity' can be thought as essential for achieving a particular sense of gendered self. Experienced as an ongoing anxiety, masculinity-as-identity needs to be constantly laboured over and proven, to oneself and to others (Kimmel 1994). In this sense, 'hardcore' bodybuilding becomes a full-

¹⁰⁸Image and text source: <http://www.animalpak.com/beproud/assets/BeProud.cfm>; ac. 08.09.2011.

blown technology for achieving the status of 'man' and for demonstrating this achievement. What differentiates it from earlier configurations of the 'same' masculinity are the terms in which some of the constants (of labouring and proving) have come to be effected and communicated: most notably, the 'total' character of this project of the self, the distinct and distinguishing physical spaces ('hardcore' bodybuilding gyms), the proliferation of technologies and networks for visualizing the processes and results of self-actualization, and a sense of global community of practice and identity largely constituted through the circulation of dominant images and narratives.

I have also argued that the extreme effort in the dominant model of practicing bodybuilding is rendered meaningful in terms of a culturally-privileged discourse of efficiency, performance, and development. The logic of potentiality, tentatively introduced in the world of 'pure' bodybuilding in a late-1960s/early-1970s USA context (Chapter 5), has in the space of the last 30 years turned into an imperative. In the case of 'hardcore' bodybuilding, notions of 'fulfilling one's potential' inform a hierarchy of worth and achievement. This can be also thought in terms of what Hoberman (2005: 212) identifies as a late-modern, Western culture where "personal authenticity [is sought] not through self-examination but through performances that express self-assertion." In this paradigm, the body becomes a central site for actualizing and literally performing oneself. To the extent that this is an identity at least partly constituted through a fundamental anxiety [of not being (seen as) 'man enough,' of not (being perceived as) 'realizing one's maximum potential'], the specular body assumes a distinct gravity as it comes to 'speak' beyond doubt, at a glance, the effort, dedication, and achievements of the person, and ultimately their 'character.' Thus, in its capacity to communicate the 'truth' of the person, the 'freaky' body is essentially appreciated in the culture of 'hardcore' bodybuilding as a spectacle of self.

For the constitution of this model of embodied practice and the sense of self arising from it, the field of elite bodybuilding transpires as crucial in more than one ways. As an organized framework of social and economic activity, it operates on a rationality of maximization of performance. Here, extreme effort makes sense in the context of the dominant model of competition that involves both the amateur and professional ranks. Originating in the USA scene of the mid-1960s, and juxtaposed to other models of amateur competition and/or moderate or non-instrumental practice more generally, this dominant model is defined by the winning ethos and the way

this shapes a particular relation to one's practice and body (Bourdieu 1994b). Elite practice, thus, becomes the de facto high point of the ultra-dedicated approach and total investment in the body characteristic of 'hardcore' bodybuilding. By extension, elite bodybuilders become exemplary individuals in a hierarchy of 'seriousness' and distinction, while organized competition becomes a theater for this model of self-realization. Similarly to the broader world of sport, bodybuilding competition can be appreciated in terms of a series of "tests and ordeals that can demonstrate success, showing that personal growth has been achieved" that have emerged as a necessity in a culture that emphasizes "a cultivation of the self [...] and individual development" (Hoberman 2005: 210). At the level of gender construction, the masculinity of 'hardcore' bodybuilding defined by notions of self-challenge and extreme effort takes on another dimension in the context of elite, and particularly professional, bodybuilding that has increasingly come to operate as an occupational field. 'Seriousness' and sacrifice are here framed in terms of a career in bodybuilding and an identity of the professional athlete, too.

Despite it being a 'world apart,' the field of elite performance and its model of embodied practice set the tone for the larger continuum of 'serious' bodybuilding. Through the central place it enjoys in internationally circulated representations of the dominant culture, it comes to function as an ideal representation and focal point for the global 'hardcore' community of practice and identity. Particularly from the 1990s onwards, this 'inside,' produced in the discourses of dominant bodybuilding culture as 'proud,' 'uncompromising,' and 'anti-conformist,' is largely defined through its opposition to an 'ignorant,' 'indifferent' and/or 'hostile' 'outside' characterized by 'mediocrity.' Some of these antagonisms are framed in terms of the constitutive Other bodies of the late period: the 'fat,' 'soft,' 'slimy' (Johansson 1998: 21), 'lazy,' 'unfit,' 'wanna-be,' 'undeveloped' body. Although in such formulations more 'traditional' types of social stratification and antagonisms may be conflated (e.g. social class and/or national culture), a hierarchy of the Body -and its version particular to dominant bodybuilding culture- seems to bear a weight of its own, too. In a late-modern, affluent Western context where bodybuilding methods have been popularized and considered public knowledge, the 'lower' tiers of this hierarchy of the Body are populated by those who are assumed to know they can 'transform,' 'respect,' and 'maximize' their bodies but choose not to (ibid:18).

Building on the discussion of Chapters 6 and 7, the following chapter explores the issue of drug use for bodybuilding purposes. On the one hand, I look at

how drug use has become a central feature in 'outside' representations of dominant bodybuilding culture. More specifically, I show how in a post-1990s USA climate of anxiety over performance enhancement and anabolic steroids, bodybuilding and bodybuilders have been portrayed as 'monstrous' in the sense of 'irrational,' 'risky' and 'pathological.' Contrary to such perspectives which most of my respondents dismissed as distorted stereotypes, drug use inside bodybuilding culture is framed as 'rational,' 'educated' and in line with a dominant model of practice characterized by instrumentality and performance maximization. At another level, I am looking at how notions of the 'good' body have changed over the years inside the culture alongside the introduction and popularization of new pharmaceutical technologies. Appreciating the field of elite practice as the pinnacle and mirror of a whole culture of performance and enhancement, I also bring attention to the dominant competition model and how it renders drug use a practical necessity.

Chapter 8

A 'Monstrous' Practice for Producing the 'Monstrous' Body: Drug Use for Bodybuilding Purposes

Introduction

Moving on from the paradigm of elite performance (Chapter 6) and the model of embodied practice (Chapter 7) characteristic of dominant, organized bodybuilding culture, the present chapter sets out to discuss drug use for bodybuilding purposes. Understood inside the culture as a type of 'performance enhancement,' the use of pharmaceuticals has been introduced in bodybuilding since at least the 1960s, as holds the case for then neighbouring sporting activities, such as Olympic weightlifting and power-lifting (Fair 1999). This process was gradual and it was not until the mid/late-1980s that the chemically-enhanced model was consolidated. The emergence around the same time of 'natural,' i.e. drug-free, bodybuilding as a distinct, alternative, organized bodybuilding culture can be precisely viewed as evidence of the expansion of the dominant, 'enhanced' model.

Although drug use for bodybuilding purposes had until recent years been largely unacknowledged or downplayed by the 'official' voices of the dominant culture, certain factions and their allied media now exist that openly condone and discuss the use of such drugs, in itself a sign of the direction of the culture. In the confidential and informal context of my ethnography, none of my respondents denied the prevalence of this type of enhancement, or -in the case of bodybuilders operating within this dominant model- their own personal use for that matter; as it will transpire from the interviews I discuss below, most of them adopted a pragmatic approach in speaking of how this drug use is appreciated inside the culture.

The way I have structured the chapter reflects the lines of enquiry that made me decide to explore the issue of drug use in the first place. Firstly, drug use is a recurring feature in representations of the culture from the 'outside.' A profiling of bodybuilding as 'monstrous' in the negative sense is typically based on this most contentious of practises, and is understood 'inside' the culture as malignant stereotyping. The first sections of the chapter explore the exact form this tension assumes as well as how drug use fits the dominant model of embodied practice and

ensuing sense of identity that I have examined in the previous chapter. By situating the debate in a post-1990 USA climate of anxiety over performance enhancement, and anabolic steroids in particular, I show how drug use has been an important factor in shaping a sense of 'inside' in opposition to a 'misinformed' and 'hostile' 'outside' that I have started tracing in Chapter 7.

Secondly, I look at drug use as crucial in producing the 'extreme,' highly technologized, 'freaky' body aesthetic that has been dominant in the culture during its late period, and particularly intensified since the mid-90s. Adopting at points a historical perspective, I trace the emergence of new technologies and the effects they have had on notions of the 'good'/'better' body. In the process, I also try to see how such developments fit the dominant, evolutionary accounts of the culture's trajectory discussed in Chapter 6. I round off my discussion of the drug 'equation' in the last section by touching upon the operation of bodybuilding as organized sport and how performance enhancement transpires as necessary and effectively 'natural' in the model of competition currently dominant in the culture.

In thinking and writing this chapter, I have relied considerably on a number of my interviews. The respondents I have quoted have been involved in different capacities in bodybuilding culture, and I shortly introduce these before quoting them. One of them in particular, Kevin Richardson, I consider a principal respondent in my research. Even if not quoted extensively, our encounter, which bore mostly on the issue of drug use for bodybuilding purposes, greatly influenced my perspective on bodybuilding. A lifetime 'natural,' i.e. drug-free, bodybuilder, he had taken up the practice at the age of 14, in the late 1980s in Trinidad. Based in NY since 1994, Kevin's main occupation is a recreational therapist, but he is also a personal trainer, health and fitness writer, martial arts teacher, practising acupuncturist, and the former owner of 5th Avenue Bodybuilding Gym in Brooklyn, NY. Self-identifying as 'outside' the dominant paradigm in bodybuilding, his take on it was in crucial ways very different from most of my other respondents. Having himself participated in bodybuilding contests in the past as competitor, judge, or promoter, being friends with past and current champions of the professional 'scene,' and getting to know dominant, organized bodybuilding culture 'from the inside,' he had come to view the very notion of competition as very problematic. He located what he saw as the structural entropy of the dominant paradigm in the instrumental approach to the practice it cultivates. For Kevin, practising in order to look a certain way has been the unfortunate yet prevalent model in dominant bodybuilding culture, evidenced in

beginners and the elite of the sport alike. He, instead, had eventually opted for practising bodybuilding as a kind of internal journey that merely happened to reflect on the surface of his body. Even if I do not juxtapose in detail his model to the dominant one, it has functioned as an underlying contrast that helped me more critically appreciate the 'necessary' and 'logical' character of certain practices and attitudes in dominant bodybuilding culture, and drug use in particular.

Representations of Bodybuilding from the 'Outside:' a 'Monstrous' Culture of Pathology

In the introduction to his seminal study *Bodybuilding, Drugs, and Risk* (2001), Lee Monaghan claims that bodybuilding and bodybuilders have been demonized on grounds of their assumed engagement with risky practices that are potentially harmful to oneself and to others. As early as 1981, Gaines and Butler (1981:72) bring attention in their revised and updated edition of the classic text *Pumping Iron: The Art and Sport of Bodybuilding* to mainstream perceptions of the bodybuilding world as "rife with junkies." Bodybuilding culture -or rather its dominant version which is what general publics recognise as 'bodybuilding'/'bodybuilders'- is indeed largely identified with drug use, and representations of the culture from the 'outside' are typically framed around it.

Of the various pharmaceuticals used for bodybuilding purposes, anabolic steroids can be singled out as key in more than one ways. Their use and the way this has been represented in the public domain has shaped not only commonly held perceptions of bodybuilding culture but, as a consequence, a sense of group identity in opposition to an 'outside.' Particularly in the American context, which is the focus of my research in the late period, the use of anabolic steroids has been raised since the early 1990s into an essential concern not only for elite athletics but for the whole universe of sporting activities and the lives of young people (Assael 2007). Enjoying wide visibility and firmly defined as part of the country's War on Drugs, steroid use has been framed as a public health issue in the USA.¹⁰⁹ In the past decade, one could

¹⁰⁹Many writers point to the 1988 Seoul Olympics Games and the failed doping test by Canadian Ben Johnson after his victory in the 100-meter race as that critical moment that effectively turned steroid use into a public issue (Assael 2005; Hoberman 2005; Hotten 2004). In the USA, the uproar reached its first climax with the Anabolic Steroid Control Act of 1990 whereby Congress decided, against the evidence presented by expert bodies, to make anabolic steroid use for non-medical reasons illegal by

argue it has intensified into a type of moral panic (Cohen 1973) whereby, as Assael (2007: 297) contends, even the term 'steroids' itself has become an all-purpose, fear-generating rubric like 'terrorism' or 'global warming.'

This environment has shaped in important ways perspectives of bodybuilding culture as 'monstrous' in a negative sense. Not only are the drugs in themselves widely believed to negatively effect physical and emotional health, causing severe health problems or even fatalities as well as uncontrolled and violent behaviour;¹¹⁰ on top of that, representations of the culture from the 'outside' often link their use with what is portrayed to be the 'psychological core' of the bodybuilding world characterized by insecurity and instability. In this light, the use of bodybuilding drugs is often presented as irrational, risky, and pathological. Crucial in the articulation and reproduction of such perspectives have been mainstream media representations of high-profile cases of crimes that are widely believed to be steroid-related. 'Muscles Murders,' published by renowned *Sports Illustrated* magazine in 1998 and brought up by respondents of mine in our interviews, is a critical moment in this respect. Centring on the involvement of a former professional bodybuilder and one couple of competition bodybuilders in two murder cases respectively, the article painted drug use for bodybuilding purposes as one amongst a gamut of pathological practices. What the author identifies as the "insular, narcissistic subculture of hard-core bodybuilding" is:

a volatile mix of fragile egos, economic hardship and anabolic steroid abuse. [...] It's a bizarre world of beetle-browed loners with eggshell egos who are engaged in an obsessive quest for self-mastery; of men posturing before wraparound mirrors, casting illusory reflections of strength, masculinity and virility from which hang, metaphorically, their steroid-shrunken testicles; of cartoonish characters chiselling and tanning and oiling their hairless bodies to camouflage impoverished self-esteem; of fat-free, high-protein starvation diets that can heighten the irritability and anxiety brought on by steroid abuse; and of all those needles and vials and pills -whole families of anabolic steroids, hormones and diuretics, insulin and speed [...] This subculture

adding them to Schedule III category of the Controlled Substances Act (alongside amphetamines, methamphetamines, opium, and morphine). In 2004, performance enhancement substances used in sports came once again under the spotlight with the Anabolic Steroid Control Act of 2004 which, amending the 1990 law, classified prohormones -a category of previously legal nutritional supplements mainly used by bodybuilders- in the same way as anabolic steroids.

¹¹⁰The term that has prevailed to describe violent behaviour attributed to use of anabolic steroids is 'roid rage.' Although not backed by solid scientific evidence (Monaghan 2001), it has been popularized and used extensively in media reports.

offers unusually fertile soil for aggression and, in some cases, deadly violence.¹¹¹

Respondents of mine pointed to the above piece and to similar representations in mainstream media more generally as perpetrating distorted stereotypes, contributing to a downward slope in the unprecedented cultural acceptance and popularization of bodybuilding during the 1980s primarily in the USA as well as other parts of the world. Although in the vast majority of media representations of and public debates on performance-enhancing drugs the main focus is on the world of mainstream sports, such as baseball, American football and track-and-field, bodybuilding is perceived by insiders to the culture to be further decreasing in legitimacy in this climate.

In many ways the issue of steroids, and drug use for bodybuilding purposes more generally, has greatly shaped a particular sense of group identity based on a shared embodied habitus that I have touched upon in Chapter 7. The extent to which an 'us' vs 'them' mentality has come to mark the dominant culture of 'hardcore' bodybuilding was revealed to me during my ethnography in a very practical way; namely in a low rate of response to my initial contacting for interviews. In an attempt to treat this low response rate as potentially useful information for my research, I explicitly asked several of my interviewees in their capacity as culture 'insiders' for their estimation as to why this had occurred despite my assurances regarding confidentiality and highlighting the nature of the interviews (university research as opposed to journalism). Paranoia regarding the steroid issue was one of the most popular explanations offered by my respondents regarding this unwillingness to talk to an 'outsider.' One of the top professional bodybuilders I interviewed put it in this way:

DL: While preparing for my field trip to the USA I contacted many people for interviews but got a very low response rate. Do you suspect there is a specific reason for this?

GS: I think people are kind of afraid about where this goes, or saying the wrong thing. I mean a lot of people who do this sport are wondering "Oh my God, is this a good thing to do? I don't know what I should do with this. Why

¹¹¹<http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1012887/index.htm>; ac. 09.04.2010. More recently the violent crime cases involving professional bodybuilder Craig Titus (2005) and professional wrestler Chris Benoit (2007) have further fueled such discourses.

does he want to interview me?" It is almost like they are kind of scared of this coming all of a sudden back to them, you know...It could be a part of...'What is this about?' Maybe it is always the steroid thing. People are always afraid of that. They say "I don't want to talk about this, they'll ask me probably this question about steroids."¹¹²

'Setting the Record Straight:' Drug Use and the Rational Project of the Self

Reactions from 'inside' against representations of drug use, and bodybuilding culture more generally, as irrational and pathological are often framed around notions of science and knowledge. 'Mainstream' opinion is typically attacked as 'ignorant' and often directed by political and media interests. To this 'skewed' perspective, culture insiders juxtapose the 'informed' views and 'real-life' knowledge of a community of practice that includes not only the world of bodybuilding but other sporting activities where similar performance enhancement is standard practice, such as weigh-lifting and power-lifting.

Much of this discourse I was able to research as it was being articulated in bodybuilding media from 2004 onwards, following an exacerbation of the steroid anxiety in light of high-profile cases of doping in elite sport and reports on rising steroids use by adolescents in the USA. In this context, prominent figures in the dominant, organized bodybuilding culture who openly condone 'responsible' and 'educated' use have engaged in a type of pro-steroid activism. A suggestive example of this is the 'Roid Rage' segment of HBO channel's 'Real Sports' show,¹¹³ where

¹¹²In some cases I was faced with this explanation in a much more direct way. Such an instance occurred in my first field trip, during my visit at Gold's Gym in Venice, California. After spotting a well-known professional bodybuilder, I approached him, introduced myself, and asked for an interview. He agreed and asked me to return the next day; when I did, though, he refused to do the interview, telling me in a rather abrupt tone: "I don't want to do this...I don't want to talk about steroids." Later I found out that he had recently experienced severe health problems that had sparked public discussions as to whether they were linked to his drug use for bodybuilding purposes. The overall point I am making here regarding this climate of suspicion, and the implications for research, were also confirmed by respondent Chris Bell, the director of the 2008 documentary film *Bigger, Stronger, Faster: the Side Effects of Being American*, who was researching -among other things- the bodybuilding industry the same time I was. In our interview, he indicated that the current climate in the USA breeds a paranoia that exceeds the world of bodybuilding, encompassing every public domain where performance enhancement takes place.

¹¹³First aired on June 21, 2005.

John Romano appeared in his capacity as senior editor of *Muscular Development* magazine.¹¹⁴ In his regular magazine column addressing an audience of 'hardcore' bodybuilders, he celebrated the show as a positive exception in the world of mainstream representations of steroids and their users:

How many times in the last several months have we sat in front of the TV, watching congressional hearings, news programs, talk shows -even the president's speech¹¹⁵- and cringed at the inequity; the balls-out lying about the dangers of anabolic steroids? Well, finally, a mainstream news program had the cojones to stand up and let the science tell it like it is. [...]
This time, all you zealots, professional alarmists, lobbyists and other benefactors of a grave abrogation of the truth that has annihilated the freedom of healthy adult males to exercise sovereignty over our own bodies -know this: your mask has finally been pulled. The science is out of the bag and as I write this America is digesting a strong dose of the truth.

(*Muscular Development*, September 2005: 78-79)

Contrary to what are perceived to be 'outside' distorted stereotypes, drug use for bodybuilding purposes is construed by insiders as 'rational' and an essentially 'logical' aspect of the paradigm of efficiency and performance maximization that permeates the culture. Emphasizing its instrumental and scientific character, the use of bodybuilding drugs is precisely perceived as a type of 'enhancement,' a term that is in itself loaded with notions of a sophisticated employment of 'tools' in pursuit of

¹¹⁴Romano referred not only to the vast pool of steroid users and the intricate know-how they have developed, but also to his years-long personal steroid use. In the film he speaks of cautious and informed use, and is filmed injecting steroids in Mexico where the practice is perfectly legal.

¹¹⁵Reference here is made to the January 2004 State of the Union address when USA president George W. Bush both reflected and exacerbated the status of steroids as an 'issue' by including them - alongside the War on Terror, immigration, and health care- in his speech:

To help children make right choices, they need good examples. Athletics play such an important role in our society, but, unfortunately, some in professional sports are not setting much of an example. The use of performance-enhancing drugs like steroids in baseball, football, and other sports is dangerous, and it sends the wrong message -that there are shortcuts to accomplishment, and that performance is more important than character. So tonight I call on team owners, union representatives, coaches, and players to take the lead, to send the right signal, to get tough, and to get rid of steroids now.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/01/20040120-7.html>; ac. 03.04.2008.

specific goals. In the majority of my interviews, my respondents insisted on the 'proper' modes of use by emphasizing education and expert advice. The following accounts belong to two elite amateur bodybuilders I interviewed who, even if not operating in the USA scene, partook in a global model of bodybuilding where drug use is pervasive:

DL: From what I understand if someone starts thinking about becoming an elite bodybuilder they need to think carefully about the issue of using not just training and food supplements but other things as well...

JS: Yes, of course. By the way, this happens in all sports, right? [laughs knowingly] I am a personal trainer, too, so I know that maybe not the same products but similar products are used by other athletes. [...] Really, if you have a doctor or if you know the issue really good and you use the correct dosage then it is ok. It is very important to know the correct dosage. For example, say you can drink one whiskey everyday. A whiskey or a glass of red wine, it is good for your health. But if you drink 5-6 tall glasses per day then the alcohol is not good for you. It depends on the liters, or mgs of alcohol in your body. It is the same in bodybuilding with respect to everything, diet, supplements, drugs...everything. If used correctly, they are really not dangerous for your health.

When asked about how the issue of drug use is addressed in the public fora of the culture, the other respondent sketched out a similar perspective:

DL: Do you think there should be more open public discussion about it, like some bodybuilding magazines and websites have been doing recently, or should it stay something of a 'secret'?

AN: Well people need to know the truth and how to use them. The drugs we use are not dangerous, because they are first of all medicine to help people with problems. It is *how* you use it that can be dangerous. For example, the quantity and the timing...if you're using a lot for too long it can be dangerous. But it is not something dangerous to begin with. You know, when guys come to see me and tell me they want to take some drugs I tell them it is not good for them because they are young and I don't want to help with that. They respond 'ok, no problem' and then return 3 weeks after *with* the drugs and tell me 'Now I have the drugs, do you want to help me or not?' Of course I need to help them because I don't want them to make mistakes.

The least-risk rationale that my respondent above brought up is the foundation for much of the discourse put forth by those factions inside the culture that openly embrace such a type of enhancement. A part of other sport cultures, too

(Hoberman 2005), this discourse effectively produces the 'proper' use of such technologies as rational, educated, and responsible. In the culture of 'hardcore' bodybuilding, thus, drug use is appreciated as a calculated and informed risk. Taking such a risk is not compromising but fully aligned with notions of performance maximization and the radical commitment with which the bodybuilding as a project of the self (Monaghan 2001) is pursued (Chapter 7).

Ultimately, bodybuilding drugs seem to be understood by their users as falling within the larger category of what Hoberman (2005) terms 'lifestyle' drugs. Compatible with a paradigm of performance in the larger culture, such technologies of enhancement are employed to serve socially sanctioned goals, such as increased productivity, and sharply contrast to recreational drugs that "symbolise diminished productivity and personal degeneration, and that appear to threaten the work ethic" (ibid: 182). In this sense, the anxieties produced around performance enhancement, and the demonization of bodybuilding in particular, can be seen as symptomatic of a late-modern culture which "both embraces the productive effects of doping drugs and disapproves of them with a prohibitionist passions that is rooted in the traditional idea that socially disreputable drugs are consumed by dysfunctional addicts" (ibid: 268).

'It's All Drugs:' Drug Use and the Issue of Authenticity

Apart from painting drug use for bodybuilding purposes as 'monstrous' in the sense of irrational, risky, and pathological, representations and perceptions from the 'outside' are understood inside the culture as distorted for another significant reason: that is because they view the project of the built body, and especially its 'extreme' variety, as a 'fake.' Tracing what, according to him, were the formative stages of this view, former promoter of the Mr. Olympia contest and head of the IFBB's division of professional bodybuilding, Wayne DeMilia, pointed in our interview to the 1988 Seoul Olympics as a critical moment:

Look, drugs are no secret no more. The turning point for bodybuilding was September 1988. That's the date when Ben Johnson got caught and steroids became front-page news. Before that, steroids and all performance-enhancing drugs were the secret of the gym. After that happened, we were on our

European tour¹¹⁶ and I said to the guys [professional bodybuilders] "This is gonna affect us seriously, and you're gonna start seeing the changes of it within the next 3-5 years, and in 10 years we're gonna have a problem." They said "Why? It's track-and-field." We were in Madrid and I said "Look, I can read a little bit of it from the Spanish I took in college but the words I can make out very plain and you can make them out, too, are Winstrol and Stanazol [commercial names of popular steroids]. It's printed here. When we go to Germany tomorrow, it will be printed there. Back home, it is printed there. It is spoken about on the Olympics coverage. This is the fastest man in the world caught on steroids. They're gonna talk about steroids and what it does. This is no longer the secret of the gym. Everybody will look at you and say 'Oh, you must take those drugs because that's what makes you built.' You're gonna have relatives, and friends and neighbours questioning you. No longer are you built and people admiring you for the time you put in the gym and how you dedicate yourself to diet. They're gonna look at you and say 'Oh, you took these drugs, anybody can get muscles then if they take these drugs.'"

Such views challenge the moral core of the continuum of practice and identity that is 'hardcore' bodybuilding. As shown in Chapter 7, a strict work ethic and absolute dedication are central to it, shaping the way the appearance of the body is 'read' by insiders as the 'truth' of the person. In direct opposition to the objections of 'fakenes' and 'artificiality' leveled by those 'outside,' insiders to the culture of 'hardcore' bodybuilding insist on sacrifice and constant laboring as *the* critical conditions for successfully and authentically pursuing bodybuilding as a project of the self (Monaghan 2001). Whether elite bodybuilders or not, the vast majority of my respondents adopted this line of legitimating argumentation. One of the top professional bodybuilders I interviewed made the point as follows:

DL: Why do you think there are people who negatively criticise bodybuilding and bodybuilders?

DM: Usually they have no idea what it takes to get to that level. They have no idea. They think it is all gym and all drugs, well...actually they think it is all drugs, they have no idea what it takes. Half of them don't have the discipline to follow that for a week [laughs]. They don't know what we go through, they have *no* idea. [...] People look at bodybuilding differently than other sports. We don't get the support...people look at us like we're just...freaks using drugs, they don't give us the respect and support we deserve. It wasn't only until a couple of years ago that people realised steroids is not just something that bodybuilders use. Years ago they thought it was just bodybuilders. Now

¹¹⁶A compact series of contests in Europe for the mostly USA-based elite of professional bodybuilders.

they see it in baseball, in football, now people's eyes open and they see it is *everywhere*.

Instrumental drug use is here framed not only as part of a whole approach of 'seriousness' constitutive of 'hardcore' bodybuilding but also an integral aspect of elite athletics. Especially in those bodybuilding publications that openly embrace pharmacological enhancement, recent doping scandals in baseball, track-and-field, and cycling that became prominent in the American public sphere are often extensively reported upon. By presenting, thus, drug use as common, necessary and consistent with narratives of super-human commitment and application in all sports, such discourses directly or indirectly align the 'fringe' world of 'hardcore' bodybuilding with culturally celebrated fields of performance.

What bridges these worlds is not merely an understanding of performance enhancement as a practical necessity for increased efficiency, which I discuss further down, but also a particular vision of self-realization that is not compromised but enabled by the use of such technologies. Appreciated not as a 'fake' or a 'shortcut' but as a powerful tool that allows for longer and more intense practice, use of bodybuilding drugs is compatible with a search for the authentic self based on effort and performance discussed in Chapter 7. Thus, although for some "committed to the idea of authenticity, using drugs to pursue the idea of self-fulfillment is disturbing" (Parens 1993: 23, cited in Hoberman 2005: 18), for others there is no tension. Rather, the search for greater performances can precisely be thought as the backbone of a particular model of self-realization, one that athleticizes the search for an authentic self (Hoberman 2005: 212).

The Boundary of Propriety: The Case of Synthol

Apart from a focal point of friction with the 'outside,' the notion of authenticity and how drug use bears on it also shapes hierarchies of propriety and worth inside dominant bodybuilding culture. This becomes evident in the differential status that various substances used by bodybuilders enjoy. I have chosen here to discuss Synthol in its capacity as a substance that illuminates what appears to me to serve as a certain boundary of 'propriety' observed in the culture between 'real' and 'artificial.'

An injectable oil first introduced in bodybuilding in the mid-1990s, Synthol is used to instantly inflate individual muscles in order to create the appearance of greater development. It is used by a minority of bodybuilders typically on the day of the contest, and its effect completely vanishes after a few days. Its use is considered highly problematic and in many ways a taboo within the culture, especially when compared to the normalized status of a host of other substances. Rejection, to the point of indignation, of Synthol use is openly expressed even by figures that are otherwise considered to be 'soft-spoken' and 'non-confrontational,' or -put differently- very conscious about maintaining their social capital in the field. A suggestive example is the following excerpt from the training article 'Battle of the Super Freaks' featuring two top professional bodybuilders who embody the 'freaky' ideal:

Interviewer: What is your opinion on site-injecting the arms with Synthol/ Pump 'N Pose [the commercial name of the substance]? Should it be allowed for competitors, or is it cheating? Does it make you angry that some people have accused you of using Synthol?

Markus Ruehl: Some people have said that I had Synthol in my biceps, my shoulders and even in my chest, because these are all very big and freaky body-parts of me. That's ridiculous, because these areas have grown very easily for me. I swear I have never used Synthol, though in moments of frustration I have thought about putting it in my triceps [his relatively less developed body-part].

Interviewer: Branch, I know in the past you were disgusted with Synthol use. Do you still feel that way?

Branch Warren: It is total bullshit. I have no respect for anybody who does that, and you can print that. Bodybuilding is supposed to be about lifting weights and eating food to make your muscles grow. Injecting oil to make them look bigger...what the fuck is that? It looks so stupid, too. Synthol users make us all look like clowns.

(Muscular Development, September 2007: 246)

A similar opinion differentiating not only individual substances but also patterns of use on the basis of bodybuilding's 'real' meaning was voiced by a respondent of mine and former Mr. Olympia champion who, having reached his career zenith in early-/mid-80s, can be said to represent the perspective of a slightly earlier era. While essentially admitting the presence of drugs, and even his own

personal use, he portrayed an 'abusive' approach to drugs as a trait of those who pursue excellence inauthentically; identifying this 'type' of bodybuilders as 'wannabe's,' he juxtaposed them to the 'real' champions of the sport:

I think in competitive bodybuilding, they are way beyond the boundary now and they're making the image of the sport look bad, kind of...some of them, I'm not saying all of them. There are smart athletes who don't abuse themselves and do it the right way. And I can say the real champions, like some of these guys that are Mr. Olympia champions never abused, and all of these wanna-be's are the ones who are making us look bad, by using some drug like Synthol, you now what I'm saying? Or by using excessive amounts of androgen hormones, making it all about steroids. It's not all about the drugs, man. It's about how much you train, how you recuperate...I can't say I'm an angel 100% but I never ever abused my body with this kind of stuff. And when they told me about Synthol I said "these guys are sick in the head!"

When incorporating the use of a new substance in the embodied practice and accepting its effects as desirable, factors other than those of a (body-)aesthetic nature are involved. As Monaghan (2001) suggests, and I have argued above, the use of drugs for bodybuilding purposes is consistent with the conceptualisation and experience of 'hardcore' bodybuilding as a 'total' project of the self. The principles of hard work, commitment, goal setting and achievement, encapsulated in the search for 'challenges' and 'surpassing one's limits,' are not undermined but, on the contrary, reinforced and more fully materialised through the use of certain drugs. Thus, particular substances are judged as desirable and even necessary not merely on the basis of the aesthetic result they produce but also the extent to which they fit that larger model.

As a result, although Synthol-enhanced bodies may be perceived as bringing forth a more 'radical,' 'extreme' aesthetic, they are not positively described as 'awesome.' The use of Synthol remains non-normalised on grounds of a learned judgement regarding the 'proper' process of building the body. As argued in Chapter 7, those who familiarize themselves with the culture learn how to 'read' the trajectory of development and effort inscribed on the specular body (ibid). Unlike other commonly used substances that may bear a much greater health risk, the use of Synthol remains incompatible with bodybuilding's larger narrative of the self. Thus, while other drugs are understood as enabling the search for self-actualization and authenticity, the Synthol-enhanced body is precisely rejected by insiders as a 'fake.'

At least until this point in the trajectory of the dominant culture, this variety of 'freakishness' is an 'unacceptable' one.

Chemical Enhancement and Changing Notions of the 'Good' and 'Better' Body

As discussed in Chapter 5, the highly technologized body aesthetic in bodybuilding culture dates back to the American scene of the late-1960s/early-1970s, itself situated in a larger cultural fascination with 'human potential' and a model of growth based on performance. The use of 'sports technology,' as drugs used by athletes are euphemistically called, can be viewed as a 'logical' dimension and high point of a particular profile of science and applied experimentation that has shaped dominant bodybuilding culture since that time. In this picture, the field of organized competition stands out as the 'natural' forefront of 'progress,' or what Hoberman, in speaking of elite sport in general, terms 'a social laboratory' reflecting shifts in the wider culture (Hoberman 2005: 178).

As new pharmaceuticals are tested out by bodybuilders through a process of trial and error, they fade away or come 'in vogue,' shaping ideals that are embodied by exemplary figures and pursued by whole generations of practitioners, especially those belonging to or trying to join the sport's elite. The early chemically-enhanced look in bodybuilding culture (Image 14, following page) was marked primarily by the use of anabolic steroids, in quantities and combinations that are considered moderate by today's standards. In this aesthetic model, both maximum size and leanness became increasingly important, yet qualities such as 'natural' lines, 'beauty,' and symmetry remained crucial in definitions of the 'good' body.

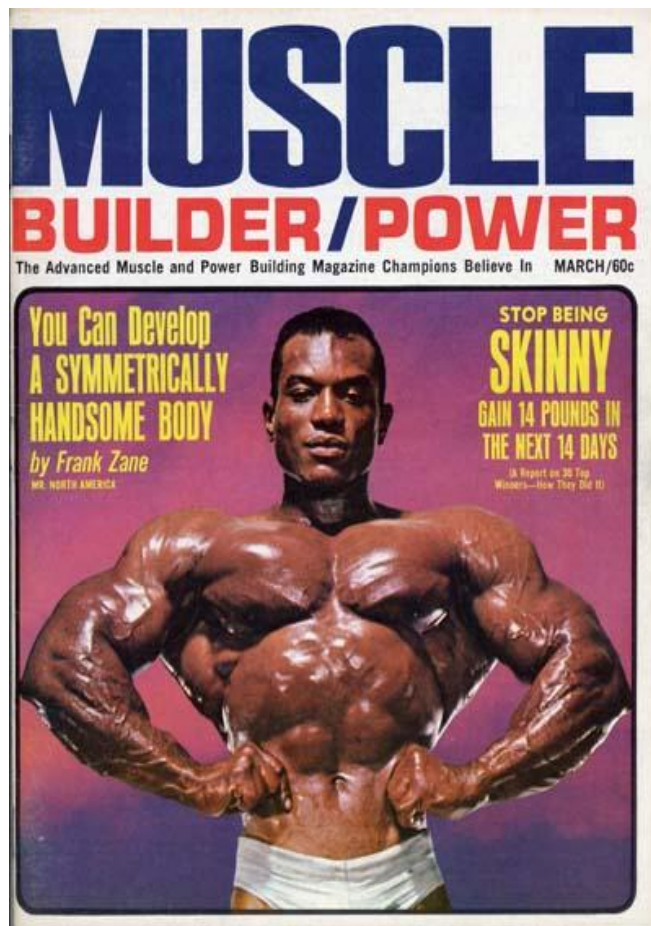


Image 14 *Muscle Builder/Power* magazine cover, March 1968¹¹⁷

Pictured above is Sergio Oliva, three-time Mr. Olympia champion (1967-1969), one of the first mega-stars of the IFBB/Weider empire and one of the few bodybuilders to have beaten Schwarzenegger in competition. Oliva's body is emblematic of the early chemically-enhanced ideal spanning the period between the late 1960s and early/mid-1980s. Although considered along other elite bodybuilders who followed similar enhancement protocols, such as Schwarzenegger and Ferrigno, as one of the early 'mass monsters,' his physique remained symmetrical and 'aesthetically-pleasing.'

¹¹⁷Image source: <http://musclememory.com/magCover.php?mb;196803;Muscle+Builder;> ac. 28.11.2010.

Although the drugs used for bodybuilding purposes were up until the early 1980s generally limited to anabolic steroids, the dominant culture has since been defined by what several writers have described as 'polypharmacy' (Evans 1997; Monaghan 2001; Phillips 1990). That is to say, a mode of use that involves combining diverse pharmaceuticals believed to help forge the dominant body ideal. According to accounts widely circulated in the culture's media as well as those of my respondents, it is the early 1990s that signalled a watershed in this regard. Regularly referred to as the beginning of the 'Era of the Freak,' this is the period when not only use of known drugs was popularised and practically rendered mandatory at the elite level, but also unprecedented experimentation with new substances and/or new combinations considerably escalated.

In the process, the aesthetic of the 'classical' or 'aesthetically-pleasing' physique loses ground to that of the 'superhuman,' the 'outlandish,' the 'extreme.' The highly technologized, 'freaky' body aesthetic combines the qualities of maximum size, leanness, *and* 'dryness' (Image 15, following page). Its production depends on a whole arsenal of pharmaceuticals: not only anabolic steroids, which help the practitioner build more muscle through improved strength levels, metabolism, and recuperation; but also human growth hormone in conjunction with insulin for retaining muscle mass while restricting calories to create the 'lean' (fat-free) look; and diuretics that are used in the days leading up to a contest to rid the body of fluids in order to produce the 'dry' ('see-through') look. Here, dramatic impact or 'shock-value' often supersedes the more 'traditional' qualities of symmetry, 'beauty,' proportion.

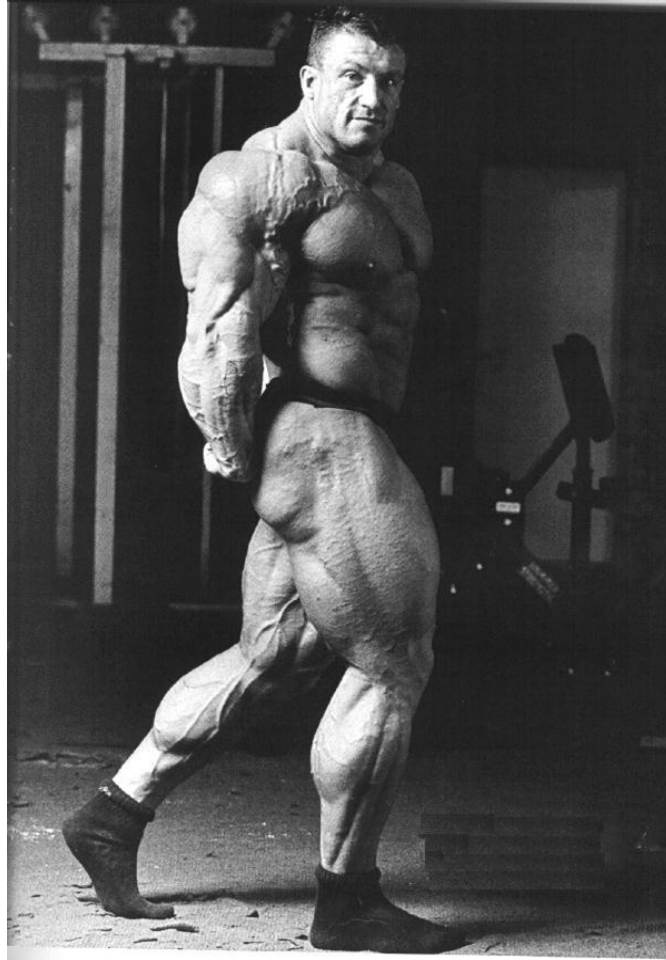


Image 15 Dorian Yates months before his 1993 Mr. Olympia victory¹¹⁸

Dorian Yates exemplifies here the 'massive,' 'lean,' and 'dry' 'look' that has been in vogue since the mid-1990s. The series of photos to which the one above belongs, taken rather haphazardly at his 'hardcore' gym in Birmingham and published in *FLEX* magazine, has become a core reference in today's dominant aesthetics. Comments of astonishment made by fellow elite bodybuilders at the time were printed in the issue of *FLEX* that reported on his subsequent Mr. Olympia win: "This is beyond reality. Nobody has ever taken the sport so far" (*FLEX*, January 1994: 114).

The introduction, popularisation and standardisation of new 'performance enhancement' protocols appear to have continuously given birth to new notions of the 'good' body in dominant, organized bodybuilding culture. In this sense, the

¹¹⁸<http://www.learn-bodybuilding.com/article.aspx?artid=22>; ac. 23.03.2011.

development of the 'look' has not always been a linear process, but rather one marked by breaks that are spoken as radical 'advancements' in the 'standards' of the sport. This appears to be compatible with what I have identified in Chapter 6 as dominant accounts of the 'evolution' of bodybuilding that rest on a 'bottom-up' model of 'progress' that is understood to be both 'unplanned' and 'logical.' On this path of ongoing experimentation with new technologies that has defined the dominant culture in the last 50 years, the very meaning of 'perfection' or aesthetic authority has shifted considerably in comparison to earlier periods. Moving further away from any notion of a set ideal judged according to definite and 'objective' aesthetic canons that refer back to a 'natural' order, 'perfection' in the current paradigm of unlimited, technologically-enabled 'progress' is imagined as an open-ended project; geared towards what is produced as a constant 'redefining of the possible,' this project flourishes on the continuous experimentation and creativity of 'free' individuals who set themselves the direction of their enterprise. Thus, the late-modern technologized aesthetic appears as 'self-generating' as it appears 'democratic.'

The effect that new technologies exert on body ideals is evidenced in the 'later is better' outlook of a dominant standpoint that naturalizes current notions of the 'good'/'better' body. The contingency of this outlook is only revealed in those perspectives that challenge both the specific body aesthetics presently extolled and the logic that lends them their commonsensical weight. In my interviews, such perspectives were typically articulated by respondents that were involved in bodybuilding competition in an earlier era or by respondents who had taken a step aside the present dominant direction of the culture. Founder of www.musclememory.com, a website dedicated to the history of elite bodybuilding, Tim Fogarty belongs in the latter category. An avid bodybuilding practitioner for most of his life, even though never engaged in organised competition, he follows the developments in today's dominant scene with a critical eye. When prompted to comment on the current 'freaky' aesthetic, he argued that:

The late 70s is certainly my favourite time period, the physiques were beautiful. They were big, juiced to the gills [extensive use of anabolic steroids] but still had great symmetry and proportionality. Then growth hormone came along, and insulin came along, and diuretics came along, and now you have to be a mass monster *and* you have to be so dehydrated that your skin is grainy. Just as we are heading this week to the Nationals [top amateur contest in the USA], I've seen pre-contest pictures of some of the athletes on Getbig.com [well-known bodybuilding website] and elsewhere, and some of the athletes are showing these pictures...there is one athlete and

his skin looks *so* grainy you can see every nodule. And he has lost so much fat that the skin is no longer smooth and it is very very grainy, it looks like sandpaper, very thick sandpaper. And people comment on it on the website saying "Oh, you look *great!*" Well, that *doesn't* look great. The problem with the times is that you don't know, you forget what came before, what used to look good and so on. Now the only thing that matters is getting down to 2% body-fat and having these wacky muscles.

Accounts such as the above help understand the dynamics of the dominant culture's reproduction. Body ideals seem to get reproduced by a dominant consensus sustained by various groups inside the culture, such as elite practitioners, audiences, and various experts, on the basis of a shared perspective. As I discuss further down in more detail, for elite bodybuilders this perspective on what constitutes a 'good' body and how to achieve it is to a great extent informed by a practical sense of the 'game' (Bourdieu 1977), that is the ingrained perceptions of what is necessary for being successful in competition.

'Gurus' and the Quest for Expertise

In thinking the dynamics that sustain the 'extreme,' chemically-enhanced body aesthetic, I would like at this point to bring attention to a particular group in dominant, organized bodybuilding culture, the so-called 'gurus.' Although as demonstrated in Chapters 4 and 5 the figure of the 'trainer' has historically been crucial in the culture, 'gurus' are a relatively new type of 'insiders' with a claimed expertise not only in training and nutrition but also, and sometimes most importantly, drug use for bodybuilding purposes (Hotten 2005: 99).

Having first emerged as 'rogue elements' on the fringes of the culture in the early 1980s (Assael 2008), they are now respectable and prominent figures with their own websites and/or regular columns and appearances in bodybuilding media. Titles of their regular features in bodybuilding publications are suggestive: 'The Bodybuilding Alchemist,' 'The Pro Creator,' 'The Contest Guru.' They provide their specialised knowledge to interested parties on a paid, one-to-one client basis and/or in public spaces such as print and online magazines that ultimately raise their credibility and client base. They are usually called 'prep-coaches' (i.e. coaching bodybuilders in preparation for competition) or 'nutritionists,' while they may refer to

the bodybuilders they work with as 'their guys' or 'their athletes.'

Their operation highlights the existence of a growing body of specialized knowledge dedicated to shaping the dominant, highly technologized body aesthetic at the level of organized competition. This specialized knowledge and the ensuing division of expertise in the culture is another aspect whereby a field of elite performance that I have been tracing comes to be constituted and recognized. The status and significance with which 'gurus' are vested are reflected, and reproduced, in the way their services are increasingly appreciated as an absolute necessity for those 'serious' about their goals in bodybuilding. Two of my respondents framed the role of such expert advice for bodybuilders involved in organised competition as follows:

BK: The only thing that I am concerned about is the amateur competition level where sometimes bodybuilders don't have the monitoring and they just think they have to do certain things and they are not educated.¹¹⁹ So to educate yourself is number one, and to have a professional with you to walk with you through this is imperative. You have to.

DL: But where do you get the responsible information for all of this?

BK: You must find somebody who knows what they are doing.

KK: Yes, that would be important, to find a good trainer...There's also a lot of information on the Internet.

BK: You must ask a professional for professional advice.

KK: So, those are the kind of people that know and they'll hook you up. So, I mean...there's people you can go to. And those are the ones, you know...And you find out who you like, you know...they might not fit your personality, you might not like each other.

BK: Like everything else, you have to do your own research and find someone you can work with and relate to. You *have* to do this. Every athlete must have a coach.

In crucial ways the demand for 'gurus' is a result of the legal regulation - sometimes to the point of criminalisation- of various bodybuilding drugs; this has led not only to the booming of an underground market defined by shady practices and commodities but also to a void in medical research and knowledge on the subject.

¹¹⁹John Hoberman (2005: 183-184) cites experts who argue the same point regarding the distinction in other sports between amateurs and professionals, and how the latter are considered to be safer because known and expected to use drugs, hence better monitored

This was brought up by many of my respondents who deplored not only the existing lack of expertise in the orthodox medical establishment but also a cultural climate in the USA and elsewhere that, by framing research on performance enhancement drugs as 'unethical' to begin with, further prevents any positive developments in this field. As a result, drug use in search of the body ideals celebrated in the culture has been characterised by experimental approaches that are largely unmonitored by 'mainstream' doctors, in other words a *de facto* underground and 'edgy' direction.

Approvingly or disapprovingly, some of my respondents brought my attention to the impact this class of 'insider' experts have had on the culture's direction. More specifically, the reliance on and reverence of such figures inevitably seems to be a significant factor in the (re)production of the highly technologized, 'freaky' body aesthetic given the direct and indirect influence they bear on the sport's elite and on those trying to join it. In this sense, although relatively few in number, their influence on the culture's direction appears to be considerable, and growing. In our discussion of the normalisation of insulin use in bodybuilding competition, for example, a respondent of mine involved with the culture in different capacities over several decades, immediately referred to one of the most famous 'gurus' in the field:

Insulin came into bodybuilding sometime in the 90s. And the guy who knows most about it is Chad Nichols. He is the one who does the contest preparation for many of these guys [elite bodybuilders] and that's why they all look so big and hard, like they are made of bronze. Cause like I said, bodybuilders overtime *really* figured all this stuff out.

In a more critical tone, Kevin Richardson, lifetime drug-free bodybuilder and critic of the dominant bodybuilding culture and its chemical direction, highlighted in our interview both a certain uniformity of body aesthetic at the elite level, and the reproductive cycle of social relations of which it is an expression:

You look at the Mr. Olympia competition and it is maybe just four or five guys on the planet that can take you to that place, tell you what drugs to use and how to use them to make you a Mr. Olympia competitor. End of story. And they are making a lot of money... They are doing their thing and they have a vested interest in promoting the whole drug culture as well, of course. The magazines love them cause they create this freaky look, a look that the people who read them, the very small number of people who read them, go crazy for. The contest promoters like them because they draw a crowd at their contests and they make their money as well. They got their own little world and so this is how it stays.

In Search of the Winning Edge: Drug Use and the Dominant Competition Model

At the level of organised competition, drug use is not merely common but pervasive. This appears to be perfectly aligned with a model of competition utterly shaped by the winning ethos and the way of practising this breeds, as demonstrated in the previous chapter. Pharmacological enhancement features as 'common sense' in the context of a 'no-holds-barred' approach to the embodied practice determined by a motivation to 'make it in the game.' Originating as shown in Chapter 5 in the USA context of the late-1960s/early-1970s, and continuing since then to exert its effect on a global scale, this model has dominated both amateur and professional domains, effectively rendering the former a 'farm system' for the latter.

Irrespective of their personal stance on the subject, all of my respondents defined drug use as a 'must' in today's competition environment. Although, as previously discussed, drug use for bodybuilding purposes is generally understood in the culture as safe when done 'properly,' the extreme measures taken at the elite competition level, and which include but are not limited to drug use, are known to bear health hazards of variable severity.¹²⁰ The normalization of such risks is partly effected through direct comparisons with the wider world of elite athletics, such as in the following response by Bill Dobbins:

DL: I am trying to see whether this drive to test the body in bodybuilding competition and do 'whatever it takes' in the process has been given priority over some other approach.

BD: What sport at its highest levels doesn't have athletes willing to sacrifice their bodies in order to become champions?

DL: So you think this is inherent in the very concept of sport competition?

BD: Yes, on the level we are talking about. This is not recreation. This is *serious*.

¹²⁰What I refer to here as 'health hazards' can range from intense feelings of unwell-being during or around competition time, such as nausea, cramping, and breathing difficulties (typically due to a combination of drug use, dehydration and starvation to create the 'extreme' look), to more severe dysfunctions of vital organs. The high-profile cases of professional bodybuilders Mohammed Benaziza in 1992 and Andreas Munzer in 1996 whose premature deaths were directly attributed to substance abuse in preparation for competition are regularly pointed to as reflective of the early/mid-1990s radicalization of performance enhancement.

Respondent Lonnie Tepper, a sports writer and physical educator involved for decades in promoting bodybuilding contests, espoused the same line of argumentation in our interview. His references to mainstream sports are a common occurrence in discussions on drug use for bodybuilding competition. Such use is in fact presented as perfectly compatible with the identity of the elite athlete. Once again, a particular idea of the 'nature' of bodybuilding competition serves as the taken-for-granted foundation of the debate:

DL: What about concerns about the health of the people who actually have to take that step further and use more drugs in competition...

LT: Well, are you gonna ask a baseball player like Mark *McGwire*¹²¹ "Why are you taking these drugs?" Are you gonna ask a swimmer that? Are you gonna ask Floyd Landis¹²² that? Why are they *all* doing it? Because they wanna win! What was the study that was done in the 1986 Olympics games, asking people "If you were given a drug that would guarantee you a victory but would cut 5 years of your life, would you take it?" I think 95% of the people said they would still do it. People who are competitive...I don't think they necessarily *like* these things, they feel they have to do it because the next guy is doing it.

The extent to which drug use is embedded in the current model of competition in dominant bodybuilding culture was also evidenced by those respondents of mine who -having been involved in the culture for many years- resisted suggestions for institutionally regulating performance enhancement by implementing doping testing; their rationale was that such a move would ultimately result in bodybuilders resorting to even more extreme and potentially dangerous practices in their quest for the winning edge. All this corroborate in the case of dominant bodybuilding culture the claim that Hoberman (2005) makes regarding the lessening distinction between illegitimate doping on the one hand and socially acceptable forms of drug-assisted productivity on the other. As he argues, "one consequence of this vanishing boundary is that the de facto legitimizing of a drug can also create an implicit or even explicit obligation to use it for purposes society or certain subcultures define as desirable. Compulsory doping of this kind has been observed in certain athletic subcultures for many years" (ibid: 4).

¹²¹Professional baseball star involved in a performance enhancement scandal in 2005.

¹²²World-class cyclist involved in a performance enhancement scandal in 2006.

The significance of an 'elite' peer culture and the building of a certain standard of performance which bodybuilders try to keep up with and supersede was highlighted by other respondents, too. One of them was at the time of the interview a top professional who had begun his career as a 'natural' bodybuilder, participating in drug-tested shows run by 'natural bodybuilding' organisations. According to his account, it was when he attempted the crossover into the NPC, the largest amateur bodybuilding federation in the USA and precursor to the professional circuit of the IFBB, that he was introduced to the realities of the dominant paradigm:

DL: Would you say that drug use is necessary to compete at this elite level?

DM: Yes, to make the playing field equal for everyone. If you are taking a completely new [substance] that nobody else is using, then it is different. But to compete in the NPC you have to [use drugs]. The way I was before, I couldn't go the NPC like that. It would make no sense. I wouldn't be where I am today, nobody would know who I am.

Do you *need* it? It could be done without it if you take it out completely and create an even playing field for everyone [...] I didn't know anything about that, I was totally naïve, blind...I had no idea that this thing exists. The revelation came when I thought "Why do I keep losing shows? That guy is looking better than me." Then I heard "This guys is not natural." That's when I started picking up that these guys were not natural, but I thought we were all the same. I was totally naïve, blind to it [laughs].

Commenting on the same state of things, yet from another standpoint, is respondent Kevin Richardson. Having come to be very critical of the very concept of competition in bodybuilding, Kevin saw drug use as indeed a 'logical' step in a whole relation to the practice and one's body characterized by instrumentality in the pursuit of the 'look.' Reflecting on his own trajectory and his eventual disenchantment with the pervasive yet 'unspoken' realities of the dominant culture, he argued:

Talking about my own case, as a teenager looking to become a bodybuilder, had I had the information I have now, it would have made the choices I made a lot easier. Back then [late-80s] it was a lot more difficult. Being a drug-free bodybuilder, haven't used steroids all my life, not ever having anyone to sit down and tell me: "Listen, this is what bodybuilding is really all about. It is not about the health and fitness perspective. It is about looking a certain way on a certain day and winning the trophy, that is what it is *all* about." I think it is important to get that side out. Not the Arnold Schwarzenegger-beautiful-Venice Beach...after a while, you see the other side.

Thinking with the above responses, the adoption of a by-any-means-necessary logic at the elite level and the subsequent normalization of states of unwell-being appear to be the culmination of the model of competition currently dominant in the culture. The operational rationality of this model is so ingrained that it is taken as the commonsensical foundation of the whole enterprise. It is defined by, firstly, a winning ethos that gets crystallized in, without being limited to, professional competition. Secondly, by the place that appearance holds in evaluations of the 'good' body: not only has 'the look' practically and formally become the sole criterion of excellence through a shift in the late 1960s that I have traced in Chapter 5; equally importantly, there has also been a shift in how the 'look' is 'read' at the level of organized competition. Thus, even if the appearance of the body has been important right from the formative stages of the culture, it was interpreted differently. As shown in Chapter 4, the look of the body's surfaces was read by early bodybuilders as a reflection of one's state of health. An instance of this perspective is the examination of the skin tone of contestants in early bodybuilding shows. In sharp contrast, in today's 'extreme' paradigm the 'look' seems to have been fetishized into a value in its own right, to the point where 'well-being' has become almost antithetical to 'good-looking.' As American bodybuilding legend of the 'high-tech' 1990s Kevin Levrone puts it succinctly in his description of that time's professional competition culture: "When we were onstage, you really challenged your body...you were there, just barely hanging in. It was like...if you were feeling good, then you weren't in shape."¹²³

Conclusion

In line with Wajcman's (1991: 149) thesis that "technology is more than a set of physical objects or artefacts [but] also fundamentally embodies a culture or set of social relations made up of certain sorts of knowledge, beliefs, desires, and practices," this chapter has explored drug use as a technology that has become central in the dominant bodybuilding culture of the past 30 years. Two main lines of inquiry were pursued in this discussion: the first one looked at how drug use is implicated to

¹²³<http://www.rxmuscle.com/videos/lifestyle/2674-kevin-levrone-talks-about-todays-bodybuilders-and-low-carb-dieting.html>; ac. 12.03.2011.

a large degree in the production of an 'inside' and an 'outside' to late-modern dominant, organized bodybuilding culture, which I have started identifying in the previous chapter. More specifically, I have situated the emergence of an 'us' vs 'them' mentality especially from the 1990s onwards in terms of a wider cultural anxiety over performance enhancement, and anabolic steroids in particular, in the USA. Such a climate has greatly contributed to the identification of bodybuilding with drug use, and its demonization as a 'monstrous' subculture, the face of which is the field of elite competition.

In juxtaposition to this 'ignorant' and 'hostile' 'outside' and its 'distorted stereotypes' of bodybuilding as risky and pathological, drug use for bodybuilding purposes is portrayed inside dominant bodybuilding culture as 'rational,' 'instrumental' and 'educated.' My findings here corroborate previous research such as that by Monaghan (2001: 96) who argues that, based on their claim of sophisticated knowledge of pharmacology, bodybuilders perceive themselves as competent risk managers, countering the conceptualisation of their risk behaviour as irrational. Through this prism, the instrumental employment of drugs is compatible with the pursuit of bodybuilding as a rational project of the self (*ibid*), and a 'logical' aspect of a whole attitude of 'seriousness' and uncompromising commitment discussed in Chapter 7.

The premium placed on 'authenticity' in the culture of 'hardcore' bodybuilding is not challenged by the use of such technologies; rather than artificial, as negative 'stereotypes' of bodybuilding would have it, their use is on the contrary deemed as enabling a fuller realization of the 'true' self. The signification and use of bodybuilding drugs as essentially 'lifestyle' drugs (Cohen *et al.* 2007), thus, seems in agreement with what Hoberman (2005) identifies as a wider, late-modern Western model of subjectivity whereby a sense of self is achieved and demonstrated through various performances. From a dominant standpoint, the use of bodybuilding drugs is compatible with notions of expanding and fulfilling one's 'potential' that, having been tentatively introduced in the late 1960s, have by now turned into an imperative. To the extent that the authentic self under construction, expansion, and demonstration is a gendered one, the above can also be thought with Kimmel's (1996) notion that realizing the 'real' male self involves a constant laboring. By enabling greater effort, bodybuilding drugs can be thought as another, very powerful, tool in the box for achieving masculinity more 'fully.' This dimension of drug use in the production of the male self can be thought alongside the more frequently commented upon

perception of certain pharmaceuticals as gender-enhancing in their own right. The case in point here are anabolic steroids which, as technologized versions of the naturally occurring 'male' hormone testosterone, are seen as 'maleness' which bodybuilders 'directly' introduce into their bodies (Klein 1993).

At another level, I have explored the impact that new technologies have had on definitions of the 'good' body in dominant bodybuilding culture. I have focused here on the field of organised competition as a 'showcase' of changing ideals that not only sets the tone but also mirrors developments at the level of 'lay' practice. In this sense, it constitutes the extreme, yet symbolically central, point of a continuum of performance and enhancement. Emphasizing the central role of pharmaceuticals in producing the 'freaky' body aesthetic that has been dominant in the culture for the past 30 years, I have tried to schematically demonstrate variations in terms of different periods by way of looking at different performance enhancement protocols and the exemplary figures that typify the respective body ideals.

Ultimately, I have argued that the shift in notions of the 'good'/'better' body that takes place along the introduction and popularization of new technologies is consistent with dominant evolutionary accounts of the culture's trajectory. Discussed in Chapter 6, and juxtaposed to earlier periods and models of bodybuilding, these accounts trace and celebrate the creative individual as the motor of 'progress' through continuous experimentation and expansion of potential. The use of drugs is implicated in a conceptualization of 'perfection' not as a return to a golden, set standard but as a limitless movement towards 'new horizons' of the possible. This aesthetic model seems congruent with the overall profile of dominant bodybuilding culture characterized by technophilia, that is an appreciation of and engagement with technology as bountiful and liberating (Monaghan 2001: 182). Looking at dominant bodybuilding culture as firmly situated in a late-modern paradigm of ad infinitum technological transformation and what Balsamo (1996: 5) calls the reconceptualization of the body "not as a fixed part of nature but as a boundary project" helps better appreciate its celebration of extremes framed in the language of the 'extraordinary,' 'revolutionary,' and 'super-human.'

The field of elite practice and organized competition becomes central in framing changing notions of the 'natural,' 'normal,' and 'human.' Endemic in the wider world of elite sport, drug use is constitutive of this surpassing of human limits that amounts to a positive and culturally celebrated 'monstrosity.' Significantly for my project, this development needs to be appreciated in light of not only a cultural

fascination with human capabilities in the abstract, but also of the practical reality of new technologies, emerging fields of expertise, and the concrete structures of the performance paradigm. Thus, the search for extremes and the breaking of boundaries in dominant bodybuilding culture makes sense within a particular model of competition originating in the late 1960s USA context and the way this shapes the relation to one's body (Bourdieu 1994b). Defined by the winning ethos and a view of the body as machine discussed in Chapter 7, this competition model conceives body appearance as an instance of sport performance that renders previously sought-after qualities, such as health or ability, effectively meaningless. The constitution of competition bodybuilding as a distinct field of practice, an 'elite world apart,' is also evidenced in the highly specialized body of knowledge dedicated to producing the dominant 'freaky' aesthetic. The emergence and operation of 'gurus' as a relatively new class of bearers of that expert knowledge reflects more generally the development of 'hardcore' bodybuilding into a culture with its own objectives, references, and taste.

The final chapter will explore the production and framing of 'extreme' bodybuilding and the 'freaky' body as formal spectacle. Through discussions with key figures and references to critical events, I explore prevailing perceptions inside the dominant, organized culture regarding bodybuilding audiences as a 'learned' public of 'insiders,' and how these perceptions influence the practical promotion and self-positioning of the spectacle of the 'freaky' body in a wider cultural hierarchy. In the process, the organized spectacle transpires in its capacity as a focal point for fortifying a sense of 'inside' and 'outside' to dominant bodybuilding culture that I have identified in chapters 7 and 8. At all times the discussion further illustrates how a particular conception of the 'true nature' of bodybuilding explored in the preceding empirical chapters operates as a commonsensical rationality in today's paradigm.

Chapter 9

'Extreme Sport' and Corporate Entertainment: the 'Freaky' Body as Commodified Spectacle

Introduction

Building on the previous empirical chapters, the present chapter completes my discussion of how the dominant, organized bodybuilding culture of the past 30 years operates and is understood from the 'inside.' The focus here is on 'extreme' bodybuilding at the level of organized spectacle. By exploring how it is defined and promoted, I discuss how the spectacle of the 'freaky' body is made possible and gets reproduced at the level of meaning and practical organization. Central to it are a particular definition of bodybuilding's 'true' meaning, whose origins I have traced in Chapter 5 in the late-1960s/early-1970s USA context, as well as a 'learned' public (Bourdieu 1993) of 'insiders' to the culture, referred to as 'bodybuilding fans.' The key spectacles, governing bodies, media, and promoters that I focus on are based in the USA. Although the corporate models and decisions I explore are built and justified with a primarily North-American public in mind, their import in the past 30 years has shaped on a global level the way bodybuilding gets framed as organized spectacle.

Bridging this chapter with my preceding discussion of the dominant model of bodybuilding at the level of embodied practice (Chapters 7 and 8), I start off by looking at drug use and its institutional regulation as a point of entry into thinking organized bodybuilding spectacle as a particular cultural form. More specifically, I look at the place of drug testing in elite bodybuilding and how it is appreciated from a dominant standpoint. In the process, a profile of bodybuilding gradually emerges in the larger continuum of sport as 'extreme sports entertainment.' Having established a consensus that, at the level of organised spectacle, a particular sense of entertainment has come to predominate in how bodybuilding is promoted and how spectators come to relate to it, I look at the affinities of bodybuilding with the wider entertainment industry paradigm. Examining shared conventions and spaces of representation, I try to show how the 'freaky' spectacle involves a particular 'staging' of the built body.

Rather than marginal, the 'extreme' built body appears here as compatible with, and often a distinct and influential form in, the world of a USA-based, corporate entertainment industry.

The following two sections examine how the alignment of 'extreme' bodybuilding with a corporate entertainment industry paradigm is reflected in the adoption of a particular business model. Situating my discussion in terms of critical moments both inside and outside bodybuilding culture, I firstly examine competing spectacles of the built body by contrasting 'natural,' i.e. drug-free, bodybuilding with its dominant, chemically-enhanced counterpart. Secondly, I look at variations inside the dominant model by thinking forms of institutional 'engineering' of the spectacle and how these have been received. Based on the points made so far, the final section looks at how the organized spectacle becomes a focal point for producing an 'inside' and 'outside' to dominant bodybuilding culture. Tracing a shift from the 1980s as a period of popularization and opening up, to the mid-1990s and the onset of insular tendencies, I claim that today's dominant, 'freaky' paradigm may appear isolated at a local or national level but gets reproduced through its global reach.

A variety of cases and sources has been used to develop my discussion in this chapter. In my exploration of the 'freaky' body as commodified spectacle, I have looked at highly visible and long-standing bodybuilding contests and media as vital spaces for literally exhibiting and reproducing the dominant direction of the culture. In particular, I have approached *Muscular Development* magazine and the 'face-lifts' it has undergone as a case study that illuminates the dominant direction of the culture in its late period, and the corresponding practical sense of the 'game' (Bourdieu 1977) that players acquire in their quest for positions of financial and symbolic power. 'Natural,' i.e. drug-free, bodybuilding and its spectacle of 'natural perfection' feature as a contrasting reference to dominant bodybuilding culture and its 'freaky' ideal. This reflects the way it was brought up repeatedly in my interviews, often unprompted. Although I situate its emergence at a particular moment in US bodybuilding and general culture, my emphasis is on how it is appreciated from the standpoint of dominant bodybuilding culture.

All the respondents quoted in this chapter, as well as those who shaped my thinking without being quoted, have been involved in the for-profit promotion of the spectacle of the built body. I briefly introduce them in the text in their capacities as contest promoters and/or editorial staff of bodybuilding media. Two of them in particular I consider to be principal respondents in my fieldwork. The first one, Dave

Palumbo, I had known through the internationally circulated American bodybuilding magazines as a top amateur bodybuilder from NY who epitomized the 'freaky' aesthetic that had become dominant by the mid-1990s. From our first meeting in 2004, I quickly got to see Dave as someone for whom his body and immersion in the organized culture of bodybuilding was his job. A consummate businessman, he used his personal website to promote himself and his various bodybuilding-related products and services. By the second time I met him in 2007, his presence in the bodybuilding 'scene' had grown considerably. He had been working as a regular writer for *Muscular Development* magazine and was the editor-in-chief of its on-line version. The website was one of the first ones to offer a comprehensive coverage of the USA 'scene' in a much more direct and timely frame than the print magazines. By 2007 its online articles, videos and fora were tremendously popular, and Dave had become in a short time a kind of celebrity figure in dominant bodybuilding culture. In both our interviews he stressed the central role of the paying bodybuilding 'fans' in the operation of the industry. For him, the value-for-money logic applies to bodybuilding as organized spectacle in the same way it does to any other sport entertainment: the public will pay to see the most 'extreme,' 'extraordinary' performances. Speaking from an elite bodybuilder's standpoint, he also enlightened me on the various motivations, financial and symbolic, involved in building the 'freaky' body.

John Romano is the other principal respondent who becomes important in this chapter. At the time of our interview at the 2004 Mr. Olympia in Las Vegas, John was senior editor of *Muscular Development* and publisher of its Mexican edition. For almost a decade he had become recognised as the 'voice' of the magazine and one of the most outspoken writers in the culture's media. Along with Dave Palumbo he was one of the central figures in building up the worldwide Internet presence of *Muscular Development*. The first articles of his I had ever read were in the mid-90s, when the magazine had subscribed for a short while to the alternative culture of 'natural' bodybuilding. At the time, his was one of the most polemical voices condemning the prevalence of drug use for bodybuilding purposes. By the time our interview took place, the magazine had reverted back to promoting the dominant 'scene' and the drug-dependent, 'freaky' body aesthetic. His contribution made me more aware of the underlying business and political agendas behind shifts and antagonisms that were typically debated amongst players in the field in terms of moral stances about what 'real' bodybuilding is.

'Extreme Sport:' The Logic of Unhindered Performance and the 'Nature' of Bodybuilding as Spectacle

Chapters 7 and 8 have demonstrated how drug use for bodybuilding purposes has become not only a 'logical' practice in the dominant 'hardcore' model of embodied practice but also essential in producing the 'freaky,' 'extreme' body aesthetic. In my exploration of how the built body gets discursively and materially produced as a particular type of organised spectacle, the issue of institutional regulation of drug use emerged time and again. Even in those interviews that I did not directly pose it as a question, my respondents themselves often brought it up in their accounts interpreting the prevalent paradigm of the past 30 years.

In the context of the dominant, organized bodybuilding culture and the governing bodies that represent it, institutional regulation of drug use has varied. A significant distinction that my respondents helped me identify was that between, on the one hand, the USA-based professional (IFBB) and amateur (NPC) organizations, and, on the other hand, the international amateur organizations affiliated with them (the IFBB international amateurs). Since the introduction of drug use in male bodybuilding, no comprehensive or sustained drug testing has been in place in the USA professional IFBB circuit. As far as the NPC is concerned, that is the only USA amateur organization affiliated with the IFBB and practically its 'farm system' since the early 1980s, certain amateur shows are drug-tested, although the larger nationwide ones that typically operate as stepping stones to the professional ranks are not. It is common knowledge to the culture that even existing drug-testing policies are not implemented strictly.

A very different picture holds for the IFBB international amateur circuit where, in contrast to the much more symbolically central USA 'scene' including both amateur and professional ranks, stringent testing protocols and rules have been for many years meticulously implemented. All of my respondents who spoke on the subject, in conjunction with other data I have collected, point to an interpretation of this policy as a necessary and highly publicized measure in a decades-long effort to have amateur bodybuilding recognised as a 'proper' sport and included in the Olympic Games. Initiated in the 1970s by leading figures in the IFBB, this struggle has been only tentatively successful: while provisional recognition of bodybuilding as an Olympic sport was granted in January 1998, it was recalled a few years later by

the Olympic Committee's new leadership that was and remains in no way prepared to recognize bodybuilding. It is in this context that most of my respondents spoke of institutional regulation of drug use in competition as a strategy for framing bodybuilding as a 'legitimate' sport according to the standards of an 'outside,' 'high' authority. My respondent Dave Palumbo, a well-known industry insider for more than two decades, put it in this way:

I think the mistake that has been made in the past is trying to treat it more like an Olympic sport rather than a sport exhibition, a spectacle. In that way I think we are going to run into problems. Because the whole drug testing issue... it is like trying to promote bodybuilding as something where people seem to be cheating or using stuff that they should not. Rather treat it as an entertainment value I say. I do not see bodybuilding ever being in the Olympics. I just do not see it. And I think it is a mistake to push it in that direction cause you are taking away the marketability of bodybuilding. I think we can push it either towards the direction of an Olympic sport *or* towards the direction of making it more marketable. I do not think we can do both. I think if we treated our sport more like the WWE¹²⁴ does, even though it is a sport...but more of an entertainment sport, I think we would be better off. I think that *then* we would generate more interest.

In the case of professional bodybuilding, the very few times that drug testing was introduced, enforced and/or intensely debated are spoken as moments of crisis, owing to developments inside bodybuilding culture, a general climate in the US regarding performance enhancement, or a combination of both. The 1990 Mr. Olympia and 1991 Arnold Classic competitions in particular emerged several times in my interviews as critical moments in this respect. Testing professional bodybuilders for anabolic steroids at these high-profile events seems to have been closely related to the criminalisation of the substances effected in 1990, and possibly to the appointment of Arnold Schwarzenegger as the head of the US president's Council on Physical Fitness, too. Similarly, the testing for diuretics highlighted in 1996 -only to be relaxed a few years later- is understood to have been implemented as a direct 'response' to the widely publicised deaths of two professional bodybuilders and health problems of various of their colleagues due to diuretic overdosing in preparation for competition. Dave Palumbo, among other respondents of mine, interpreted such occurrences as a strategy on the part of governing bodies to appear

¹²⁴World Wrestling Entertainment: the prevalent professional wrestling organization in the USA.

responsible and pro-active, effectively conducting drug testing as "a form of public relations" as is the case in other professional sports (Hoberman 2005: 238):

DL: So how did the IFBB here in the USA initially react to this search for extremes through performance enhancement?

DP: I don't think anyone even talked about it. See no evil, hear no evil. I don't think they really started addressing the subject until probably in the 90s cause anabolic substances didn't become controlled substances until 1990. I think the issue didn't really start until *after* that time. The Mr. Olympia was drug-tested in 1990 for steroids, and the following Arnold Classic, too. Shawn Ray [professional bodybuilder] actually failed the Arnold Classic drug test and they took away his title. So they did drug-test one Mr. Olympia and one Arnold Classic. They tried it. But then the athletes didn't look as good and the marketability was slipping and they just said "You know what? We're gonna do away with this" and they kind of adopted more of a...they went for diuretic testing. I mean they started testing the more dangerous type of stuff that could cause the athletes problems *at* the events. There were two bodybuilders who died because of diuretics although there was no proof to it, Benazziza and Munzer. That kind of sparked the whole "we'd better test for diuretics" scenario or other stimulants and stuff like that. And that continued up until recently, and then the testing kind of just disappeared. As far as rules enforcement goes, something dramatic has to happen that will outrage people.

Such interventions on the part of governing bodies are widely perceived inside dominant bodybuilding culture as an attempt to 'pull the breaks' that is inherently against the 'nature' of bodybuilding and prevalent definitions of the 'good' body. In trying to define the bodybuilding spectacle as a cultural form, many of my respondents used the term 'extreme sports entertainment.' Such a definition of bodybuilding at the level of organized spectacle is consistent with accounts of bodybuilding's 'true nature' at other levels that I have discussed previously (namely as elite field of progressive performance and as a particular model of embodied practice discussed in Chapters 6, 7, and 8). Growing in visibility and status in the past decade, 'extreme sports entertainment' precisely emphasizes a logic of performance without any restrictions, a type of 'unhindered' sport spectacle which, in a larger continuum of sport, is contrasted to other types (e.g. Olympic). In my interview with former editor-in-chief of *Muscular Development* magazine John Romano, I asked for his take on the domination of the spectacle of the 'freaky' body, and how the official promotion of bodybuilding shows as indicator and reproducing force of their prevailing signification had been shaped accordingly. He responded as follows:

Bodybuilding is an extreme sport. Just like watching a guy jump from a cliff, ride a skateboard down a mountain, or like auto-racing and MMA [mixed martial arts], doing crazy shit...It is an extreme sport. That's why you watch it. It's the out-most extreme. And if you say "This is the out-most extreme without drugs" well...then it is just not the out-most extreme anymore.[...] We've evolved –if you want to use that word, I don't know a better one– from an aesthetic art form or sports art form to basically professional sports entertainment. And the pro sports entertainment is by virtue of where the freaky physiques have come. Try to think of auto-racing, I think Formula 1 is a good example. As technology increased, performance increased. So you went from cars that were very slow and handled poorly to cars that went really fast and were well-handled. We learned about turbo charging and down force and telemetry from the cars to the pits and were able to produce cars with 1000+ horse power that went very fast. *Too* fast, they became dangerous so they took the turbo chargers off and cars are now normally aspirated again so we are trying to de-evolutionise the sport of auto-racing. However technologies keep increasing and now cars are back up to almost where they were before. Bodybuilding is more or less the same way. Just like in auto-racing where the audience wants to see the fastest, most incredible exhibit of pro sports driving. They want to see that in bodybuilding, too.

As in many other instances in my interviews and in dominant bodybuilding discourses, comparisons abound with other sporting activities that, in their capacity as organized spectacles, are believed to share with bodybuilding a fundamental operational rationality. In this light, elite bodybuilding, and in particular the dominant, USA-based circuit including amateurs (NPC) and professionals (IFBB), gets situated in the context of a wider, corporate entertainment industry at the core of which lies the demand for, production, and celebration of spectacles of the 'unreal.'

'Extreme' Bodybuilding and the Entertainment Industry Paradigm

Understood as an 'extreme sport,' elite bodybuilding, and its professional variety more eminently, finds its 'natural habitat' in the world of the entertainment industry with which it shares a taste for spectacles defined by hyperbole, novelty, and 'shock value.' This affinity I have identified at several levels. Firstly, conventions of 'staging' the 'freaky' body often borrow theatrical elements from a show industry repertoire that openly invokes various symbols and fantasies.¹²⁵ Out of this vast pool

¹²⁵Divides of 'propriety' are instituted between, on the one hand, 'guest appearances' where a more openly theatrical approach is allowed for the presentation of the built body through use of costumes,

of conventions and motifs, it seems to me that often elements are incorporated that help speak those dominant meanings inscribed in the 'freaky' body that I have discussed in previous chapters: the 'superhuman,' the 'transforming,' the 'futuristic,' the 'animalistic,' the 'machinic' are the ones most commonly employed. That is, figurations that are used to imagine the 'extreme,' 'hardcore' model of embodied practice also appear in the representational space of the formal bodybuilding spectacle, fitting perfectly with a visual language of exteriority and excess of the entertainment industry.

The vocabularies and references employed to frame the 'freaky' body as formal spectacle often situate it alongside pop-culture works. The 'monstrous' bodies on the stage of a bodybuilding contest and the pages of magazines get portrayed not only as instances of elite sports performance, but also as spectacles of the 'hyper-real' that exist in a system of 'marvels' enabled by technology. In an age of computer-generated imagery, bodybuilding 'freaks' in all their non-humanness appear as the more 'real' among 'unbelievable,' 'hyper-real' spectacles. The following excerpt is from the reporting on a well-known professional bodybuilding contest, the 2002 Night Of Champions. Through comparisons with established referents of popular culture -in this case the Star Wars series- extreme bodybuilding is situated in the context of a larger universe of spectacles:

May 16-18 was a landmark weekend for nerdlings and pimpled Trekkie shut-ins, who were finally rewarded with the opening of the latest Star Wars prequel, Episode II: Attack of The Clones. The Jedi warriors of the pocket-protector set had braved pale-skin-blistering sunlight and chilly nights for weeks as they waited outside theatres for their beloved sci-fi flick to open. The film would battle the previously released blockbuster Spider-Man for box-office supremacy in a competition that dominated entertainment headlines during the weekend. As expected, records were broken...

Big deal, say bodybuilding fans. Could either of these digitally enhanced, overhyped, special-effects-laden movies have contrived the improbable creatures in live action that lurked at the Beacon Theatre in Manhattan on May 18? At least it can be said that the 31 bodybuilders onstage in New York, ranging from the he-man to homunculus, were anything but clones, and that

props, facial expressions, gestures, body movements, and, on the other hand, formal competition where a more 'serious,' standardized protocol of organized sport is followed. Even in formal competition, a divide exists between the two main parts of a contest: the prejudging, taking place in the morning or afternoon, is typified by a more solemn, technical atmosphere. In contrast, the night show involves the choreographed performance of posing routines that leaves room for a more creative presentation.

the one athlete who finally emerged as the most celebrated flesh-and-blood monster was no Spider-Man. No, he was more like the Amazing Wider-Man [...]

This is a man who could have emerged from the fiendish imagination of Stephen King as easily as from a gym in Europe. His flesh isn't measured in inches and pounds but acreage. The tectonic landscape of his chest is so engorged with living moving tissue that it looks like a German bantamweight is inside each pec [chest muscle] fighting to get out. How would Yoda-obsessed cinephiles respond if confronted with Markus Ruhl [professional bodybuilder and winner of the event]? There would be disbelief, terror - a removal of Coke-bottle thick glasses for a quick cleaning with a Chewbacca T-shirt, just to be sure the eyes aren't being tricked - only to be further terrorised by the fact that Ruhl still stands before them. It's enough to dim your light saber.

(*FLEX*, August 2002: 86)

This relationship between 'extreme' bodybuilding and the entertainment industry is a two-way one: not only bodybuilders frequently allude in their adoption of career nicknames or stylised presentation to well-known figures of pop-culture, but they are also themselves employed in pop-culture works. In fact, the 'freaky' body can be thought of as the extreme end of the larger continuum of the built body that has been featured as a distinct spectacle in various cultural forms, such as films, music videos, comic books, and advertising. Hollywood productions, which I have shown in Chapter 6 to have been instrumental in the global expansion of bodybuilding, have been the primary space for representations of the built body. In what Tasker (1995) identifies as a geometrically growing trend since the 1980s, built bodies are cast in protagonistic or secondary acting parts primarily in action, science-fiction, and sword-and-fantasy movies where they embody figures of super-heroes, monsters, cyborgs, mythic warriors, and/or villains among other things. Without denying the specific impressions the built body is employed to communicate in such representations (such as power, authority, animality etc.) I would argue that it also constitutes a spectacle in itself, a 'special effect' of sorts.¹²⁶

Finally, the choice of spaces for holding top bodybuilding contests is another

¹²⁶The list is endless: building on a 1950s and 1960s Cinecitta tradition of Hercules movies featuring elite bodybuilders whose bodies were at times spectacularized even at the suspension of the film's narrative (Wyke 1997), Hollywood has established the built body as a distinct 'attraction' from the 1980s onwards. In this sense, Arnold Schwarzenegger's early/mid-1980s block-busters have been pivotal moments in a 'legacy' that lives on in recent films such *300*, *Captain America* etc.

aspect of the affinity between the organized spectacle of the built body and the entertainment industry. The staging of the pinnacle event of professional bodybuilding, the Mr. Olympia, in Las Vegas since 1999 had intrigued me since the beginning of my research. Having researched other past choices of venues for the Mr. Olympia, I asked certain of my respondents for their interpretation. The responses I got emphasized the operational considerations in such a choice, yet they also, directly or indirectly, shed light on how the spectacle is packaged and signified. According to some of my respondents, including the former promoter of the Mr. Olympia contest himself, it was an intra-field competition with the second largest event in the bodybuilding industry, the Arnold Classic, whose model was adopted, that led to the production of the Mr. Olympia as a lifestyle event over a period of several days. In Las Vegas, intensely promoted on a global level as an ideal 'leisure' destination, the Mr. Olympia is one amongst the many 'outlandish' spectacles one can enjoy. Other respondents, such as John Romano below, offered an interpretation that recognized both business factors and a certain symbolism such a choice had appeared to me to carry:

DL: I have noticed that in the past the Mr. Olympia, which is considered to be the top bodybuilding event, was often held internationally. Do you think that might have had something to do with the struggle to make bodybuilding look like a 'proper' sport and the IFBB like a respectable international sport federation?

JR: Absolutely. But they stopped doing it cause they didn't make any money. I mean 90% of these guys [professional bodybuilders] live in America, the core audience is in America, why are you gonna go to Helsinki, Finland and have the Mr. Olympia for?¹²⁷ Who's gonna go? How are they gonna pay these guys? Are you gonna have an EXPO like this [in Las Vegas] in Finland and have people pay 700 dollars for a VIP ticket? It's never going to happen. They have the Mr. Olympia in Las Vegas, the land of the extreme, and it is the perfect place for it.

DL: So you do see a connection between Las Vegas and the bodies on stage?

JR: Oh, *absolutely*. This is the only place to do it. Vegas is the *only* place. Maybe NY...but pretty much Vegas is the best place to have the Zenith bodybuilding event, *by far*.

¹²⁷This had taken place in 1992.



Image 16 Digital billboard of Mandalay Bay Hotel and Casino hosting the 2004 Mr. Olympia (field trip photo)

Not only is Las Vegas a global reference point for 'outlandish' spectacles; the city itself can be thought of as the architectural equivalent of 'extreme' bodybuilding in its reveling in all that is larger-than-life and supremely fabricated. In Ada Louise Huxtable's (1997: 40, cited in Hannigan 1998: 6) words:

Continuous, competitive frontages of moving light and color and constantly accelerating novelty lead to the gaming tables and hotels. The purpose is clear and the solution is dazzling; the result is completely and sublimely itself. The outrageously fake has developed its own indigenous style and life style to become a real place.

As shown in the image above, the Mr. Olympia extravaganza is advertised and held on the Las Vegas strip where many of the largest hotel, casino, and resort properties in the world are located. In *FLEX* magazine's (October 2007: 46) article 'Planet XXL: Las Vegas, Nevada,' Mr. Olympia champion Jay Cutler says of his relocation to the city:

Vegas is great for extreme sports like bodybuilding, because it's the ultimate 24-hour city [...] It just keeps going and growing. It's a crazy city. Everything is oversized and wild. People are used to big, crazy spectacles here, so even a 300-pound, 5'9" bodybuilder like me can fit in in Vegas.

Drug-Free Bodybuilding and the Spectacle of 'Natural Perfection:' a Losing Business Proposition

Having explored how the 'extreme' built body gets framed as a spectacle of the 'outlandish' and the 'super-human' in the context of the larger entertainment industry, I will now look further into how it also obeys to a business model characteristic of this industry. This section will focus on what transpired in my interviews and other collected data as a competition between different types of spectacles of the built body. 'Natural,' i.e. drug free, bodybuilding becomes significant here in its capacity as a different spectacle and business of the built body. Brought up by the vast majority of my respondents even when not directly prompted, it served as a recurring contrast to the dominant spectacle and business of the 'freaky' body.

As argued in the previous chapter, the early to mid-90s is a period marked by the domination of the 'freaky' aesthetic and the extreme practices that give birth to it, most notably rampant pharmacological enhancement. In a wider cultural climate, primarily in the USA but also elsewhere, where performance enhancement, and anabolic steroids in particular, had become an anxiety, dominant bodybuilding culture came in this period to exhibit progressively insular tendencies, moving away from an unprecedented popularization it had enjoyed during the 1980s. Although 'natural' bodybuilding has practically been in existence since the early days of the culture, this is the moment when it got articulated as an alternative with which dominant, organized culture had to reckon with. Explicitly framed as a reaction to a dominant direction of extremes and insularity, 'natural' bodybuilding was profiled as outward-reaching, employing a rhetoric of 'health,' 'fitness,' and 'natural perfection.'

I have found the case of *Muscular Development* magazine, one of the longest-standing American, internationally-circulated bodybuilding publications, illustrative of the points I am discussing in this chapter. In February 1997, almost 33 years after its inception, the publication radically changed its direction: renamed *All Natural Muscular Development*, it ostensibly distanced itself from the dominant bodybuilding culture it had so far promoted, and turned to 'natural' bodybuilding. Even if they did not change to the extent *Muscular Development* did, other bodybuilding media flirted at the time with this alternative. In this sense, I argue that the changes in *Muscular Development* can be interpreted as an expression of a wider turbulence inside bodybuilding culture in the mid-90s.

This endorsement of 'natural' bodybuilding took various forms: promoting 'natural' bodybuilding governing bodies and competitions, featuring only bodybuilders who had allegedly always or for a 'sufficient' period been drug-free, as well as editorials and articles in support of the 'natural' bodybuilding 'movement.' Not only the editorial content but also the overall tone and imagery of *Muscular Development* came to feature a taste for the 'real', the 'healthy,' and the 'classical' at the interrelated levels of body aesthetic, embodied practice, and organized spectacle. Concomitant with this was a recourse to grand ideological frames by promoting natural bodybuilding as beneficial for cultivating a fit, strong and wholesome youth.

In support of this 'cause,' editorials called upon important public figures both inside and outside the world of bodybuilding, such as US politicians and bodybuilding champions. In its direct and ongoing critique of the dominant paradigm, it alluded to a kind of 'return' to a model that would, ultimately, allow for a re-popularization of bodybuilding. In the following open letter to Arnold Schwarzenegger, former bodybuilding champion, cinema star, and proponent of natural bodybuilding Steve Reeves employed a rhetoric reminiscent of earlier dominant paradigms in bodybuilding culture discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. Representing 'authentic' bodybuilding, a case is made for 'objective' criteria for evaluating body perfection; significantly, emphasis is placed on notions of 'health' and 'functionality,' and how these cannot be thought separately from the body's appearance. The whole argument is ultimately framed in a language of education, integrity and wholesomeness.

Bodybuilding, real bodybuilding [...] can, and has, proven to work wonders to creating real men of substance, as opposed to what it's now become- a creator of men of real substance-abuse [...] Where are the great models for today's youth? [...] Where is the one current bodybuilding champion that you would want to instruct your children? [...]

Here's what I am suggesting as criteria for all future bodybuilding shows: let's implement real, tangible physique standards that can be adjudicated by an objective measure [...] The judges will require a tape measure, a bodyweight scale and a calculator [...] Once a person exceeds his ideal weight for his or her height, he becomes out of proportion and not only no longer possesses a 'classic' physique, but doesn't function optimally either [...]

Arnold, let's work together to put this derailed train back on the tracks and this sport back to the glory and prestige it once enjoyed and can enjoy again. Let's give them [young practitioners] a sport that has integrity and honour- and a method of physical training that will not only give them wonderful physiques but also provide them with a lifetime of health and vitality.

(*All Natural Muscular Development*, September 1997: 12, 152, 205)



Image 17 Pictorial from *All Natural Muscular Development*, August 1998

The image above is from the inaugural 'Art of the Physique: Natural Perfection' pictorial series in one of the early issues of *All Natural Muscular Development*. Representing the 'natural' body ideal, the featured bodybuilder, Anders Victor Graneheim, assumes body postures and facial expressions that highlight grace and symmetry, in this particular case in direct imitation of classical sculpture ('David' by Michelangelo). The caption to the photos frames him in the following words:

We truly believe he represents the elusive peak in physique perfection. Anders lives in a small town named Sundsvall, Sweden. In his native land, he is all the rave due to his intense fitness regime. He strides the streets of Sundsvall like a godly Adonis, modest despite his manly demeanor. His rippling muscles burst in the pale Swedish sunlight -this is Natural Man at his best.¹²⁸

¹²⁸Although I acknowledge possible homoerotic readings of this framing of 'natural perfection,' with a gay constituency possibly being consciously targeted by the publishers in the context of their broader 'mainstreaming' objective, this is beyond the immediate scope of my discussion.

In my interviews with senior members of the magazine's staff I enquired about the rationale behind these drastic changes. The responses I got differed considerably from the official rhetoric that accompanied those transitions at the time they happened. Instead of the content and tone of an almost 'ideological' conviction, I was met with the matter-of-factly, practical rationality of profit-making. John Romano, senior editor of *Muscular Development* at the time of our interview and a member of staff who had worked for the publication through the transitions, situated the shift in a specific dynamic of business competition inside the organized culture of bodybuilding as well as a broader historical circumstance in USA culture:

DL: The first articles of yours that I ever read were those back in All Natural Muscular Development in the mid/late-90s, and they seem to be completely different from what you are promoting today. I am interested in why you chose to make this move towards supporting natural bodybuilding back then.

JR: That's a very good question. There were two things happening at the same time we decided to go 'natural.' One was that Weider [dominant player in the bodybuilding industry] was locking up the athletes so we basically had no one to work with. They were signing everybody to exclusive contracts, no photo-shooting for anybody else, no appearing in anybody else's magazines, no interviews, no nothing. We had very little to work with.

Also, the extreme look had come into vogue. Concomitantly bodybuilders were pushing the envelope, Benaziza died and then after one or two years Munzer died [both high profile professional bodybuilders] and in-between there were other guys going to the hospital with diuretic overdoses and other problems...And we felt that there were natural bodybuilding federations that were not getting any exposure, and that there were rising stars there and that if we promoted them we would appeal to this anti-drug sentiment that had gotten prevalent since the first Bush administration. It was out of necessity.¹²⁹

According to the same accounts, it was again due to a practical, business-oriented strategy that 4 years later the magazine reverted to promoting the dominant, 'freaky' direction. Once again, they profiled themselves as the representatives of 'real' bodybuilding: this time around though, this stood for the chemically-enhanced world discussed in Chapters 6, 7, and 8.

¹²⁹The business-minded incentives for *Muscular Development's* shift to the 'natural' format were corroborated by another culture insider working for the magazine at the time of the interview. In particular, he attributed it to very specific financial pressures resulting from the fact that the magazine was tied to an American food supplement company that, having recently gone public with its shares, desired a 'clean' public profile without any association with anabolic steroids.

DL: Why did you decide to revert to promoting 'hardcore,' chemically-enhanced bodybuilding?

JR: Well, when we went 'natural' basically every month our readership was going lower and lower and lower. The fans didn't want it. Drug testing had been tried in the IFBB and Shawn Ray got caught at the Arnold Classic contest and disqualified and the whole thing was just pissing everybody off, nobody wanted it. And we couldn't sell to a public interested in seeing lesser when we had shown them more. You got to understand business. You got to give people what they want. So we had no choice but to revert the other way. Once we did and we went really hardcore we got our readers back. Now we are number one. And that's because we are promoting the biggest freaks. We have the Freakazoid award now [laughs]! We've gone completely the other way.¹³⁰

DL: So what you call 'the bodybuilding public' was asking for that...

JR: Absolutely. The people want to see the freaks, you got to give them what they want. Personally I wouldn't like it to be that way. I think somebody is gonna hurt themselves. I would hate to see that cause I am friends with all these guys [elite bodybuilders]. If one of my friends died chasing this ridiculous ideal that makes them the least paid, least respected, least understood professional athletes on the planet, it would be a tragedy. And I can't help thinking it's gonna happen. And I don't know how I am going to feel when it does, that I am going to be like part of it, that I helped promote it or believe that it's partly my fault. But you know...we are capitalists first, we are not a non-profit organization, we are out here to make money and we are filling a need that the public says they want. It's a tight market...you got to give them what they want.

¹³⁰The 2004 Freakazoid award of \$10,000 granted by *Muscular Development* to the 'freakiest' competitor at the Mr. Olympia contest of that year is a concrete expression of this recognition of the marketability of the 'freaky' look. This media-sponsored initiative did not last, and therefore cannot be viewed as another ongoing motivation for achieving the 'extreme' body aesthetic; it does, nevertheless, highlight the practical sense of important players in the field at a certain juncture regarding profit-making, based on perceived audience demand.



Image 18 *Muscular Development* magazine cover, September 2001

An early cover of the re-revamped *Muscular Development* in its 'hardcore,' 'chemical' direction. The professional bodybuilder depicted not only embodies the 'freaky' body aesthetic celebrated in the dominant culture but also accentuates it by 'performing freakery': assuming what in bodybuilding jargon is the 'most-muscular' pose and, more generally, embodying the laboured aesthetic of 'intensity' discussed in Chapter 7.¹³¹ A far cry from the prior moralistic overtones regarding 'health,' 'the youth,' and 'wholesomeness,' the editorial content now embraces discussion of performance enhancement in a non-apologetic fashion. This iconography, vocabulary and content addressing and producing the 'real' world of bodybuilding persist to this day. Through the magazine's international print editions and, most importantly, its immensely

¹³¹Similarly to the conventions of 'staging' the 'freaky,' 'unreal' body employed in live displays discussed earlier on, one could equally consider those employed in mediated representations. Bodybuilding photography and videography are key in producing the 'freaky,' 'unreal' body through the use of a relatively standardized combination of camera angles, lighting, bodily postures, facial expressions, and editing. Renowned photographers in the field whom I approached as the mediators and partly creators of the image of the 'freak' concurred that it involves a particular way of visually interpreting the built body. This was confirmed by my own observations at the professional bodybuilding photo-shoot I attended during fieldwork and the numerous videos of photo-shoots of elite bodybuilders regularly appearing on bodybuilding websites in recent years.

popular American website showcasing under contract 'top' professional bodybuilders, the model of bodybuilding that *Muscular Development* represents gets exported on a global scale.

Value for Money Continued: The Rules of Spectacle Marketability inside the Dominant Culture

Having focused in the previous section on the case of a well-known bodybuilding publication to discuss competing spectacles of the built body that effectively represent different bodybuilding cultures, I will now turn to variations within the dominant culture. Speaking to respondents who had been for years involved in the promotion of contests, I brought up suggestions for experimenting with a different, less 'extreme' direction within the structures of the dominant organizations. This could be effected not only through implementing more drug testing but also through other, less costly and 'intrusive' means, such as the implementation of different criteria for evaluating the 'good' body. Once again I was met with the shared conviction that any 'engineering' of that sort would disenfranchise 'the bodybuilding public.'¹³² Involved in contest promotion for a number of years and personally a supporter of drug-tested bodybuilding competition, the respondent below confirmed the 'realistic' viewpoint those operating inside the dominant culture seem to agree on:

JW: If they seriously drug-tested the Mr. Olympia or any other of the top events again, there would be no show Dimitri. Or there would be a show where no one would buy tickets to go see. Because the top athletes wouldn't be there. The industry...the people...the audience, we always want to see the records broken. Even though I'm a promoter, I'm still a fan...I respect what these athletes do. I'll never forget when Ronnie Coleman came out on stage in 2003, when he walked out I remember you could almost hear the stage every time he took a step, you know...this mastodon, the size that we'd never seen. And all of a sudden, that became the norm. That became what everything would be judged by. If they implemented drug testing, I don't think there would be a show...it would be like going back. I don't think anyone would

¹³²Certain respondents also argued that the economical and operational resources necessary for reliable drug testing -which in the case of the professional circuit should be equally applicable to elite bodybuilders around the world- are too great in their own right, particularly in the context of what they term a 'niche industry' with low profit margins.

go, a fan, because we are so used to and spoiled to what Ronnie Coleman and Jay Cutler and all these other champions have given us over the last years...I literally believe people wouldn't spend their money. A promoter, therefore, would not take the time and the effort to pay for the venue or the arena. So no, I don't think there would be a show.

Apart from a desire for exhilarating spectacles endemic in the wider entertainment industry, accounts such as the above bring attention to an industry dynamic involving 'bodybuilding fans' as a distinct type of learned public, and the expectations with which they come into the 'game.' Like other responses discussed previously, emphasis is placed again on what is understood as a continuous trajectory of 'higher performances' that cannot be 'slowed down' or 'reversed.' In debates about the place of drug testing or other forms of engineering the culture's direction 'from above,' perceptions of bodybuilding publics, business rationales, and definitions of the 'real' meaning of bodybuilding regularly merge. In fact, I often found them expressed in the same breath, almost as a unified concept. The following response belongs to another respondent involved for many years in the promotion of bodybuilding competitions in the USA. In his words, a particular definition of bodybuilding, traced in Chap 5 back to a late-60s/early-70s USA model of 'pure' bodybuilding aligned with the paradigm of 'human potential' and performance, figures here as a tautological foundation:

LT: My opinion still is that as far as banning and testing for everything that every athlete wants to do as an enhancement to themselves, I don't see that happening and I don't think that the bodybuilding industry wants it to happen. Because what really this is, it is the human body at its best potential, at its greatest potential. I don't see that the sport will turn 'natural' and succeed. It won't. Because that is not the nature of what this is about. What this is about is pushing your human body to be the ultimate it can be. And that's what people wanna come in and look at! This is the fan base. This is *bodybuilding*. *That's* what it's called.

To Be or Not to Be...Mainstream: Self-Positioning and Global Reproduction of the Dominant Paradigm

Definitions of the 'nature' of bodybuilding as organized spectacle and the subsequent perceptions of its public that I have been discussing are central in the

culture's self-positioning in the wider cultural hierarchy. Bodybuilding's 'place' or identity has been recurrently addressed and produced as a clearly articulated issue in the culture's media; it also emerged in the vast majority of the discussions I had with my respondents on the domination of the 'freaky' body aesthetic. Examining the development of bodybuilding promotion in the late period (1980s-present), it is possible to discern a shift in the self-framing of the culture. Crystallized in the question 'how could bodybuilding become more mainstream?' the 1980s represent a high point not only in the culture's actual inroads into the mainstream but also in the expectations and hopes for endless possibilities in this direction. Researching leading bodybuilding publications of the time, I found them to regularly feature editorial content dedicated to the prospects of accentuating bodybuilding's popularisation; often characterised not by abstract debates but by a distinctly practical stance, editorials and articles laid out strategies to be adopted and concrete steps to be taken (for example, ensuring that 'the sport' of bodybuilding gets regular coverage on TV and the sport press).

From the mid-1990s onwards, concomitant with the onset of 'the freaky' body ideal in competition, a shift seems to occur in the culture towards 'inward' tendencies: the question gradually changes to '*should* bodybuilding try to become more mainstream?' Increasingly, and out of a peculiar mix of necessity and conviction, the mainstream comes to be painted as both an impossible and unwanted destination. From a dominant standpoint, 'natural' bodybuilding that I have shown to become significant in this period is painted as a compromise. Attacking those voices inside the industry that supported 'natural' bodybuilding as an alternative aimed at bringing about a more 'accessible' spectacle that the 'general public' could relate to, the editor-in-chief of *FLEX* magazine writes in 1997:

They [proponents of natural bodybuilding] plead a case for scaling back bodybuilders' dimensions, with the goal being acceptance from the general public. They are asking for the extraordinary to become ordinary, for the Grand Canyon to become the, well, sorta *Largeish* Canyon [...] My bookie and I truly wish bodybuilding could go mainstream, but it's not going to happen. We have to accept that bodybuilding is a subculture that will continue growing but will never be fighting for prime-time space with the World Series¹³³ [...] Let's concentrate on giving the fans who buy contests tickets and magazines what they want to see, instead of tailoring this 'weird' subculture for a public that surely doesn't want it and a media that, when they

¹³³ The World Series is the annual championship series of the highest level of professional baseball in the United States and Canada.

present it, take the easy route of perpetuating the bodybuilding stereotype.

(*FLEX*, February 1997: 95)

This discussion of the distinction bestowed upon and engendered by bodybuilding as organised spectacle echoes the picture painted in Chapters 7 and 8 of bodybuilding as embodied practice and as an organized culture that has come to imagine itself not only as radically different from mainstream culture but being so in an 'unapologetic,' distinguishing fashion. At the level of organized spectacle, such a stance employs notions of the 'extraordinary' and the 'few and select' to build distinction for the spectacle, performing bodybuilders and publics alike. In effect, it is precisely through this discourse that the organised spectacle is produced as the 'face' of bodybuilding culture, a focal point around which notions of an 'inside' and an 'outside' come to be visibly constituted.

As I have shown to be the case in previous chapters, this antagonism is here, too, framed in both normative and self-referential terms. Written in a rather condescending tone, the following late-90s *FLEX* editorial 'We're All Freaks Now' is an example of the former. With bodybuilding's popularization serving as a starting point, the elite level is with one stroke framed as both distinct and distinguishing as well as part of a larger continuum that includes general culture. Significantly, the text of the editorial is complete with a photo of its author and self-proclaimed creator of 'pure' bodybuilding, Joe Weider, with Arnold Schwarzenegger, the quintessential representative of dominant bodybuilding culture and its global popularization:

'Going to the gym' is [nowadays] as commonplace as shopping at the supermarket. Biceps are popping out of soccer mums, CEOs and supermodels [...] The kind of physiques that were shunned decades ago are adored [...] Still, some disrespect is levelled at our sport's elite. I'll tell you the same thing I told my friends decades ago: Stick to your guns; they'll come around. It will be always this way, because just when you think the general public has caught up to us, we take the sport to another level.

(*FLEX*, July 1999: 8)

Despite the popularisation and recognition of bodybuilding as embodied practice, the field of elite performance, crystallized in the past 30 years in the spectacle of the 'extreme,' 'freaky' body remains out of the sphere of wide public

acceptance. In accounts common in the dominant organised culture of bodybuilding such as the one quoted above, this is only naturally so: the 'sport's elite' represents a vanguard with mainstream culture being in an endless relation of 'catching-up.' In a wider, future-oriented western culture that glorifies innovation and the continuous 'breaking of boundaries,' this is clearly framed as a claim to legitimacy in its own right; a legitimacy conferred not only to elite bodybuilders and the spectacle they embody but also to those who can appreciate it, i.e. the people the very editorial directly addresses and produces as such.

What can be viewed as a certain resentment against an 'outside' in the above opinions typical of the mid/late-90s has, by today, to a great extent given way to a less polemic, more matter-of-factly approach. In my interviews, turning (back) bodybuilding to mainstream seems a non-consideration. Even if continuing to vividly confer distinction, the ubiquitous designation of the bodybuilding spectacle and the culture it represents as 'a world of its own' was embraced by most of my respondents in what appeared to me as a sort of 'relaxed' resignation. Here, a self-referential framing based on the principle of lifestyle and individual choice is prioritized. As respondent Lonnie Tepper, involved in the promotion of amateur drug-tested bodybuilding contests as well as professional ones, put it:

To me the hardcore bodybuilding fan still is attracted to the muscle. Bodybuilding is about *muscle*. It is not about mainstream and trying to make it more palatable for a mainstream person. You're not gonna get that mainstream person. If you were gonna get that mainstream person, you'd already be getting them at the shows we already have that are drug-tested, where the guy at 5'8" at 183 pounds wins, this more 'normal' look, you know what I mean? Why are *those* not filled with spectators?

It is a cult following and it will always be so. I personally am not a fan of opera. There's nothing you can do to get me to be a fan of opera. You may give me two tickets to one event and I'll say "Oh, that was interesting" cause I got them for free and I'm never gonna be back. I don't think you can bring bodybuilding to the mainstream, I don't think that is what we should be doing. We should try to make it better for the people within our own industry. I teach college, I am around mainstream people all the time, they think we are a bunch of weirdos and all that [laughs].¹³⁴

¹³⁴As in Lowe's (1998) study of female bodybuilding, my respondents brought attention to the fact that bodybuilding is a participant sport, which in itself compounds a sense of distinction for the spectacle and its audiences. A continuum, thus, of practice and 'insider' knowledge appears to connect those on and off the limelight, including performers, spectators, officials, promoters, and journalists alike.

Despite its insular tendencies in the past 20 years, the USA-originating model of 'extreme' bodybuilding continuous to grow through its expansion over national borders. Often described by my respondents as a 'niche industry,' it does not enjoy the appeal of some of its 'extreme sport' neighbours, such as mixed martial arts, professional wrestling, and types of auto racing, that have turned into immensely profitable enterprises even if operating on the fringes of cultural 'respectability.' Yet, as both a commodified spectacle in its own right and as a gateway to the larger bodybuilding industry, it has found an extended market and audience through various communication technologies and exchange networks. Recent years have seen a global expansion of the spectacle and business of the 'freaky' body through various channels: the staging of IFBB professional contests outside the USA, typically in Europe and recently in Asia, allows for promoters, elite bodybuilders, bodybuilding media, and companies of bodybuilding technologies alike to expand into international market territories; all major bodybuilding magazines now feature online versions, in some cases more than just their 'main' American one, promoting dominant bodybuilding culture and producing a relatively homogeneous 'hardcore' bodybuilding public in different parts of the world; companies of bodybuilding technologies, that is the backbone of the bodybuilding industry, both distribute their products on growing global markets and, through their strong internet presence, promote dominant bodybuilding culture.

Individual bodybuilders also fully partake in this spirit of entrepreneurship. By achieving the 'freaky' 'look' celebrated in the dominant culture of the moment, they can get rewarded with winning or placing high in formal competition, which translates directly into prize money and fame. Even more importantly, they can enter into business relations with the various players that make up the bodybuilding industry: companies of bodybuilding technologies, especially food supplements, hire them to endorse their products; magazines to appear in photos and interviews; contest promoters to participate in their shows either as competitors or as 'guest posers' (i.e. giving bodybuilding exhibitions outside the context of the formal competition). In addition to and partly as a result of the above, elite bodybuilders can brand and 'sell' themselves directly to their fan-base. Since the early 2000s, the Web has had a catalytic effect in this regard, and nowadays all professional and many amateur bodybuilders of the USA-based circuit have their own personal websites, while they might appear in parallel on a number of other industry websites under or outside a contract. Such virtual spaces typically provide free content, allowing 'fans'

worldwide a sustained glimpse into the accomplishments and trajectories of the dominant culture's stars; all of them also have shopping sections with DVDs depicting bodybuilders preparing for specific competitions, autographed photographs, food supplements and training equipment endorsed by the athlete, and a multitude of subcultural paraphernalia.¹³⁵ Effectively, the whole world becomes an easily accessible audience and potential market. Thus, even if individual bodybuilders and 'extreme' bodybuilding as a cultural form and industry remain relatively closed off in the USA or any other individual nation, their activities and direction are sustained and even fortified due to their global reach.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the 'freaky' body in its capacity as commodified spectacle. Researching representations of it in dominant bodybuilding culture of the past 30 years and speaking to respondents who have been involved in its promotion, I have sought to understand how it is signified and practically operates. The spectacles, governing bodies, magazines, and promoters that I have focused on are those of the USA-based dominant bodybuilding 'scene.' Although their thinking and decision-making models are shaped with reference to a primarily American audience and market, they also set the tone for bodybuilding as organized spectacle on a global scale.

The prevalent definition of the spectacle of the 'freaky' body is that of 'extreme sports entertainment.' Such an identification, gaining ground inside dominant bodybuilding culture since the 1990s, can be partly interpreted as a result of bodybuilding not being recognised as a sport in the wider society (Monaghan 2001: 66) and in the legitimating, 'proper' universe of Olympic sport. This self-designation as an 'extreme sport,' compatible with a dominant model of embodied practice that I have traced in Chapters 7 and 8, finds bodybuilding in the cultural neighbourhood of other sports spectacles of a corporate, USA-based entertainment

¹³⁵Various other technologies, networks, and conditions have contributed to the increased ways for converting one's symbolic/cultural/bodily capital, such as the production and distribution of food supplements in a deregulated USA market, sophistication in food technology and advertising, development of national and international payment and transportation infrastructures that facilitate economic exchanges and circulation of commodities, etc.

industry that gets exported to the rest of the world. In this context, the 'freaky body as a spectacle of the 'super-human' and 'hyper-real' figures as a particular genre of entertainment that combines the 'high,' culturally-central paradigm of science and performance with the 'low,' pop-culture world of fantasy and hyperbole. The amalgamation of these two becomes apparent in conventions of staging the 'freaky' body, involving the "enactment of a tradition, the performance of a stylised presentation" (Bogdan 1988: 3). Similarly to the conventions of representation that 'speak' the effort and dedication entailed in the production of the 'freaky' body, discussed in Chapter 7 and 8, this visual language of the 'freaky' body as entertainment genre I discuss in this chapter remains incomprehensible to the 'untrained' eye.

Apart from a logic of spectacle and excess, 'extreme' bodybuilding shares with the corporate entertainment industry a particular business model, too. Its value-for-money logic becomes most evident in an environment of business antagonism between competing spectacles of the built body and the cultures they represent. The thesis unanimously supported by those respondents of mine that already occupy or strive for positions of power in the bodybuilding industry is that the promotion of the 'freaky' body is the only sound business strategy. Audience demand is constantly portrayed as the underlying foundation of this rationality: respondents working for key bodybuilding media, which compete with each other on the basis of providing not only information but also entertainment, and promoters of competitions concur that 'the bodybuilding fans' demand the 'freaks.' This perception is more often than not presented as an insurmountable external factor, a 'natural law' of the market which must be adhered to by those involved in the industry whether they -as 'individual persons'- approve of it or not.

The 'bodybuilding fans' that directly or indirectly my respondents referred to emerge as a distinct, 'insider' public with a particular 'taste.' Part of this is a set of 'expectations' with which they come into the 'game.' Here, the entertainment value of the 'freaky' body makes sense in terms of yet another dimension of a learned gaze. In this case, the fascination is based on a 'connoisseur' knowledge whereby the 'freaky' body as a type of sport performance is situated and appreciated in light of other past and present performances (Bourdieu 1999). More broadly, the specialised nature of the spectacle and the corresponding learned gaze required to 'fully' and 'properly' appreciate it, which can be contrasted to different framings I have discussed that actively 'open up' to a general public, operate as a claim to cultural legitimacy in

themselves. In this sense, 'extreme' bodybuilding appears placed in a system of activities, spectacles, and communities that are celebrated in their 'uniqueness' and 'tradition.'

Openly acknowledged or not, a particular definition of the 'true nature' of bodybuilding is embedded in the schemes of perception and models of practice examined. Its formative steps having been traced in the late-60s/early-70s (Chapter 5), this definition now serves as the commonsense foundation of a dominant standpoint that understands the spectacle of 'natural,' that is drug-free, bodybuilding as something of an oxymoron. Drug testing at competition is not only antithetical to the inherent logic of high performance sport (Hoberman 2005: 195) with which the spectacle of the 'freaky' body is fully aligned; it is also understood as incompatible with the larger self-profile of dominant bodybuilding culture and its 'evolutionary' accounts that I have been tracing throughout my empirical chapters. That is, drug testing, or any other intervention 'from above' for that matter, is viewed as an unnatural engineering of a trajectory of continuous 'progress' motored by free, creative individuals that can only be 'naturally' regulated by audience/market demand.

What has also transpired from the discussion is how the organized bodybuilding spectacle becomes a focal point for a community of practice and identity, helping shape an 'inside' and 'outside.' Not only is it painted as the apotheosis of the dominant model of practising bodybuilding, but it also constitutes a highly visible, formalized expression of the culture's 'own' taste and tradition. It also constitutes the most widely circulated body of representations of the hegemonic, USA-originating paradigm, which, in light of new technologies of communications and exchanges, functions as a core point of reference for a community of 'hardcore' bodybuilding that transcends national barriers. Thus, what critics of the dominant, organized bodybuilding culture pejoratively call 'their own little world,' is also a decisively global one. Although exhibiting insular tendencies at a local or even national level in the last 20 years, 'extreme' bodybuilding and the 'freaky' body become sustainable both symbolically and financially through their expansion on a world platform.

Further Thoughts and Projects

As stated in the introduction, the present project has its own limitations and boundaries. Some of these were consciously set early on, partly in recognition of the considerable historical scope of the research, while others I came to realize much later on as I matured into the project. Disentangling myself from a professional competition-centered, US-originating, and globally exported dominant bodybuilding culture and its narratives I had grown into has been an ongoing and only partially completed process. Although I was able to break through some of the 'common-sense,' naturalized facets of the dominant ideology, there are others whose fuller importance is not accounted for in the present thesis and could be a legitimate object of further study. For example, dominant accounts, upheld not only by those at positions of significant power but also by members of minorities who have already experienced or are striving for success in the organized culture, paint the post-1960s USA paradigm of 'pure' bodybuilding, whose pinnacle is the field of professional competition, as a world of meritocracy where 'race' or any or any other identification (nationality, religion, sexuality) are simply irrelevant to success. Future research could examine in depth alternative accounts, particularly in the context of a sport where evaluations of excellence, hence prospects of success and recognition, are not based on objective criteria (that is measurements as is the case of most other sports) but, rather, on subjective judgments.

Such a line of analysis could look into whether the dominant 'muscle-for-muscle's sake' model, historically established as one of 'straight' sport where 'the best man wins' and defined partly in juxtaposition to an earlier model of 'ideal manhood' where criteria and evaluation processes left (more) room for discrimination, is as egalitarian as it presents itself to be. At all times, an interpretation of institutional policies or individual decisions that either support or undermine this dominant narrative would have to take into account the corporate business model that permeates the larger bodybuilding industry of which professional competition is a small, yet central, cog, as well as processes of intensifying popularization of bodybuilding as both embodied practice and spectacle on a global terrain of diverse cultural, 'race,' ethnic, religious and other backgrounds. Moreover, apart from the highly visible and symbolically central 'elite'/professional level that has been the focus of the present thesis, an examination of the role of visible or non-visible

difference could also be attempted at the local or (in the case of the USA) state-level where the rank-and-file of bodybuilding competition lies.

There are also certain aspects and processes of bodybuilding culture that, although accounted for in the thesis, are rapidly developing in the present. One of the more interesting ones is the configuration of models of understanding and communicating the self in visual terms, and how these travel. The ensuing social organization of appearances, based on instrumentally building and presenting one's image to others and to oneself, is shaped both by growing and deepening fields of professional expertise (professional bodybuilding being one such field in a system thereof) as well as it becoming a familiar territory for extended 'lay' populations that partake in it at the level of technologies, practices, and rationalities. Thus, a process that in the literature review I partly traced back to 19th century urban centres and the new modes of (re)cognition they brought forth is growing and mutating in 21st century's global spaces, largely enabled through the Web. The rapidly changing landscape of the bodybuilding world of the last 20 years, inside which I attempted my research, is marked by dynamic and sometimes conflicting processes. On the one hand, the models of self I have identified in my analysis are both expanding in their reach and becoming more 'total.' Parts of the globe that were previously outside this picture are now being introduced to it, often on the organized initiative of various 'experts' that export the 'experience' and 'sophistication' of decades of 'progress' achieved in the technologically advanced West. As an integral part of this, the production and circulation of representations of ideal bodies, and by extension selves, enable the expansion of a capitalist market not only through their content (comparison and competition) but also through a fundamental homogeneity that is not challenged by variations at the places it reaches. In this light, the first professional bodybuilding championship to have been held in Mumbai, India this past September (2011), a week after the Mr. Olympia in Las Vegas and featuring some of the largest celebrities of the USA 'scene,' is a highly symbolic stroke in a much larger canvas that includes 'mainstream' Bollywood stars hiring foreign bodybuilding and fitness experts to get them 'in shape' for their next film with an audience of millions, and online bodybuilding communities where ordinary practitioners can interact and share their photos and stories of self-transformation in a relatively direct and unmediated way.

Concomitantly, already existing networks delve deeper to visualize for a

global audience the lives and trajectories of elite bodybuilders as exemplary figures of the culture: in recent months, bodybuilding 'fans' have been able to 'follow' in print and online magazines their idols not only instrumentally prepare their bodies for competition but also overcome injuries or simply live the bodybuilding lifestyle in its minutest details. At the same time, some of the fundamental assumptions of this model of a self that exists as such in order to and to the extent that it can be demonstrated are destabilized: the popularization of technologies that allow for images and impressions more generally to be manipulated or produced in their entirety without any 'real' referent problematizes the 'truth' of the 'look' and raises issues of 'authenticity' that I have shown to be central in the culture of bodybuilding.

Another dimension of the present research which I would like to follow up is a model of subjectivity whereby the body becomes a site of the 'real' self insofar as it is subsumed into a logic and practice of performance. In this context 'extreme' bodybuilding transpires as the far end of a culturally respectable continuum whose origins can be traced back to a fin-de-siècle exaltation of physicality. A notion of 'positive animality,' controlled, productive, and invigorating that seems to have originated in a white, male, middle-class, Anglo-Saxon environment seems in late-modernity to have been incorporated unto a hegemonic discourse of 'performance maximization' and 'actualization of potential' to which everybody seems invited. In many ways this relates to the discussion above given that in this 'physical' model of self there seems to be embedded an imperative of not only 'actualizing' oneself but also making this visible, of demonstrating 'authenticity,' and in this sense lending itself to a logic of image and exteriority.

In this paradigm of authenticity, potentiality, and performance, ideas and practices of 'enhancement' are progressively turning from a problem of a moral order regarding the 'natural' order of things, to a naturalized, 'commonsense' attitude. As Hoberman (2005) argues more generally, and I have shown in my discussion of drug use for bodybuilding purposes, various technologies are deemed as enabling a fuller realization of one's 'potential' and, by extension, 'true' self. In effect, the drug regimens employed by 'hardcore' bodybuilders are an edge of a much wider gym culture, in turn reflecting an even wider performance culture, where the use of various substances is being normalized. As recent research (Collins *et al* 2007) indicates, it is not anymore at the contained sport elites that one should look to account for the spreading use of various 'enhancement' technologies, such as anabolic

steroids, but rather at the much wider populations of 'dedicated' gym goers. In this light, 'anti-doping' at the level of policies and educational campaigns becomes a less and less straightforward issue, especially as younger generations are being introduced to a mainstream logic of performance not only by joining gyms at an earlier age but even before that, as they need to become more 'productive' at school.

The global expansion of the bodybuilding industry and the ongoing popularization of technologies of physical transformation that used to be the esoteric knowledge of the 'muscle-world' translates as I have shown into higher financial and symbolic stakes for those 'seriously' involved in bodybuilding competition. In striving for success in 'the sport,' material bodies whose market value is their very visual impact are not only having to compete for the approval of a judging panel in the context of a constantly intensifying formal competition; they are also vying for the attention of a public that is gradually desensitized to 'extreme' spectacles through a torrent of available images. Some of these images are of elite bodybuilders, easily and comfortably accessed around the clock on bodybuilding websites that, competing with each other for this same public, renew their content regularly and opt for 'shock value.' The impact these 'freaky' bodies can exert is conditioned by being placed not only in a system of other 'freaky' built bodies, but also, directly or indirectly, in a larger system of 'extreme' spectacles that include, but are not limited to, other sports entertainments.

How these developments will bear upon the actual production of the material built body cannot be told with certainty. If, though, the recent history that I have traced in my discussion of the bodybuilding spectacle is any indication, one can expect an intensification of experimentation. Although only mentioned in passing in a couple of my older interviews as a possible future scenario, gene doping does not appear too distant a reality. As indicated by my respondents, bodybuilders of the dominant technophilic paradigm have traditionally been at the 'forefront' of experimenting with technologies that other sports only 'catch up to' at a later stage. Apart from a shift in conceptions of the field of elite performance in terms of a hierarchy of 'genetic talent' that I have discussed, gene doping technologies also carry unknown ramifications regarding health. The course and the effects of these rather probable developments will also depend on the stance that institutions and society at large will adopt. As I have discussed, the dangers in experimenting with the capacities of the human body are not only brought forth in the first place by an

environment that demands maximization of performance and productivity, but they are also compounded by what Hoberman (2005) identifies a prohibitionist stance regarding 'enhancement.' Although the claims of my respondents and members of other sport (sub)cultures cannot be unproblematically accepted, it is worth thinking whether the risks in performance enhancement are (at least to some extent) due to modes of use and products of questionable safety, both largely resulting from the criminalization of certain substances and the ensuing booming of a vast underground market, as well as the lack of considerable scientific research in this area (because of its 'unethical' nature).

On the other hand, it appears that in the dominant world of elite bodybuilding, described by respondents of mine as having already entered a stage of 'maturity' in terms of its performance horizon, as well as in more traditional individual sports, we are approaching certain physiological limits of the human body. At least for the time being, these seem to figure as a concrete end to the 'unlimited horizon of possibilities' that has defined the logic of elite performance. When these limits will be reached, how, and at what price, remains to be seen. What seems more certain in comparison is that there *will* be an effort to reach them. In this light, the culture of 'extreme' bodybuilding, even if marginal in some ways, transpires as the far end of a dominant continuum where economic and social structures partly depend on and reproduce a particular conception of 'human nature;' one where notions of a fundamental 'curiosity' interweave with an equally fundamental tendency to 'challenge' ourselves and explore our 'potential.' As I have demonstrated in the thesis, this was framed by self-proclaimed pioneers of 'pure' and professional bodybuilding in the late 60s USA in terms of a culturally-central narrative, condensed in the question: '*How far can we go?*' 50 years down the line, the 'freaky' built body of today can be thought of as an expression of a larger hegemonic model of unsustainable growth that remains both naturalized at the level of ideology and omnipotent at the level of power relations, structures, and distribution of resources. Instead of signs of entropy, its smaller or larger problems and crises (such as the series of health issues resulting from the dominant model of embodied practice and competition that I have discussed in the thesis), like those of the larger cultural and economic paradigm in which it operates, are perceived as merely issues that will be overcome with increased sophistication and some tweaking (Zizek 2009).

Moving on directly from the above point, the 'alternative' culture of 'natural' bodybuilding is an interesting object for further study. In this thesis I have discussed

a culturally and historically-specific form it has assumed, and essentially examined it from the standpoint of the dominant paradigm. In juxtaposition to the latter's fascination with and pursuit of growth at all costs, taking pharmacological enhancement out of the equation can be seen as a step towards a more sustainable model of cultivating the body through the bodybuilding method (which, despite its extensive variations, can still be fundamentally traced to a combination of weight-training, diet, and recuperation). Yet, this does not necessarily entail a radically different relation to one's practice, body, and sense of self than the one reproduced in dominant bodybuilding culture. According to my key respondent Kevin Richardson whom I have introduced in Chapter 8, for some the decision not to use drugs for bodybuilding purposes may be largely motored by a 'purity' stance that assumes a certain moral superiority over those who do, and by extension a sense of self defined by this opposition. At the level of institutional rhetoric, this seems reflected in the 'natural' reclaiming of bodybuilding in a mid-1990s American context that, as I have shown, was framed around a certain notion of 'health,' 'purity,' and 'propriety.'

More importantly, drug-free bodybuilding does not necessarily entail a challenge to an instrumental relation to the embodied practice, which brings me back to a model of the 'visible' self that I touched upon earlier on. In other words, engaging with bodybuilding *in order to* produce a certain impression of oneself, largely concentrated in one's 'look,' for others and for oneself, in the context of formal competition or in the 'lay' spaces of everyday life, can be a logic of practice that 'natural' bodybuilders share with their 'chemically-enhanced' fellows. In any case, many of the very technologies that have enabled the spread of the chemically-enhanced paradigm on a global level are being used to challenge it, by presenting not only different models of practice but also different versions of a history of bodybuilding that, as I have argued, is a significant aspect in the reproduction of the dominant edifice. In this sense, a model of bodybuilding that resists an instrumental approach to the practice, interpreting drug use as precisely the high point of such an instrumental approach, could be articulated on a global level as an alternative of 'degrowth.'

Apart from the articulation of global alternatives to a decisively global dominant paradigm, further research projects can be undertaken on how the latter is received and negotiated unto existing body traditions at the various places it reaches. By examining relatively small and culturally homogeneous societies, like Greece for example, a comprehensive picture could be sketched of how different groups, already

formed by their class habitus and national culture, relate to such a hegemonic, 'imported' cult of the body. In the case of Greece, undertaking such a study could potentially help think interpretations of today's crisis that focus on processes of a cultural nature alongside the strictly economic and political ones. More specifically, it is worth investigating whether the cult of one's body and image, distinctly popularized in Greece in the past 20 years through increased availability and acceptance of relevant practices and spectacles, reflects a (currently shaken) climate of affluence and the onset of a culture of impressions. In this underdeveloped part of the developed world, the high profile gym culture has enjoyed can be located at the intersection of, on the one hand, a discourse of (the need for) modernization, development, and efficiency, and, on the other hand, a game of impressions that somehow seemed open to all.

Part of this process has been the importation of yet another 'outside' framing of 'our' cultural heritage: a late-modern construction of Greece as the cultural origin of the 'hard body' ideal (Johansson 1998) that I have discussed in the thesis got intensely introduced in Greece from 1980s onwards. Its body ethic marked by notions of 'performance maximization,' 'serious effort,' and 'potential expansion' has not been an easy fit with long-standing national traditions (of food, socializing etc.). Yet, its peculiar mix of 'Greek-ness' and exoticism, and the relatively new spectacle of self it brought forth, have been a perfect fit for a more recent national culture shaped by the onset of private TV and media conglomerations from the 1990s onwards (themselves shaped by and shaping an emerging class of professional experts of self-presentation). Through a rather successful adaptation of other imported media models to a native tradition of 'small society' where everybody knows everyone else, the transformation of the body through exercise, diet, and expert advice quickly became both a spectacle of physical transformation for large audiences previously unaccustomed to it, as well as an instance and/or metaphor of social self-transformation during the past couple of decades when everything seemed (more) 'possible.'

In terms of the actual experience of the current crisis, it would be interesting to explore whether the cult of the body has shifted, and how. Does it fade away as a secondary need in the presence of more pressing demands? Does it persevere, and if so in what forms exactly? In the context of a conscious or unconscious response to 'outside' processes that is marked by a return to or insistence upon the privacy of oneself, the cult of the body may manifest itself as 'taking care' of one self, zeroing in

on a preoccupation with personal 'health' and/or the cultivation of an appearance that denotes that everything is (still) in order. At the same time, in an environment of tension where physical violence or its threat becomes in urban centers a recurring scenario rather than an utterly unlikely exception, the building up of the body may figure as a pursuit of strength and the image of power. In this sense, it can flourish as one amidst an array of 'pragmatic' strategies adopted by individuals and groups of various political persuasions, levels of organization, and 'places' in the current dynamic.

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