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# Self-Improvement In and Through Sports: Cultural-Historical Perspectives

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the development of the modern self-improvement cultures in and through sports using three paradigmatic historic examples. It is theoretically based on Michel Foucault's and Gilles Deleuze's analyses of the disciplinary society and the society of control and especially on Foucault's concept of 'self-technologies'. Empirically, the question of improvement will be investigated by the means of three different paradigmatic fields of movement cultures in three different historical periods. The first one is the invention and the establishment of systematic rational enhancement regimes in the second half of the nineteenth century, which can be summarized under the term physical training. The second one focuses on the formation of the big number of bodies, as we can determine it, for example, within the 'sport-for-all-initiatives' during the 1970s in Europe (especially in Germany and in Austria). Third, we take a look at the highly individualized fitness practices from 1980 to the end of the millennium and finally some questions concerning the post-Fordist body regimes as we can find it, for example, in 'life-logging-' or 'quantified-self-movement', will be posed.

## KEYWORDS

Body history; self-technology; improvement; cultural history; fitness

## Introduction

Let us start with one example. This is about the training practice of the young Austrian ski racer Anton Sailer (1935–2009) during the 1950s. He had a very successful career during the 1950s during the time of the resurrection of the Austrian nation after the Second World War. He won three gold medals at the Winter Olympics in Cortina d'Ampezzo in Italy in 1956 and became a national sport hero. But this is not the central point here. More interesting is the physical training he undertook. If we look into his autobiography, we can find an interesting account regarding this.<sup>1</sup>

As were so many others involved in sportsmanship at the time, Sailer was already practising and training almost every day, even during the summer when it was not possible to ski. But he had to train early in the morning before work because he was in regular employment in his father's company in the small Austrian town of Kitzbühel. What would

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now be considered astonishing concerning his training regime in the mid-1950s is that on his way to his daily training schedule, before he started to work, the young skier put on his working clothes. Although many would now consider this wholly unnecessary, at the time there was a clear reason. His fellow residents of Kitzbühel did not seem to accept his involvement in *sport*, as yet.

Every day at six I was on the slopes; in working clothes. People would have disapproved of a tracksuit, they would have driven me away or thought that I was crazy anyway. I changed my clothes in a hay barn, ran up the 'Hahnenkamm' [a steep mountain], rushed down again, got changed again, ate breakfast and went to work. Almost every day.<sup>2</sup>

What is most astonishing in this example is the obviously general poor acceptance of physical exercise in the small urban and rural area of Kitzbühel in the 1950s. More than this, Sailer had to hide himself when he was exercising, to avoid being watched when he was training in public. This example of the practical training of the ski racer Sailer during the 1950s is only one instance of self-improvement in sports in the last century. From it, we can learn how the social embedding of attitudes towards sport, the training itself, the scientific know-how, acceptance, motives, the protagonist, the discourses or the goals now differ from present physical exercise practices.

In the following paper, the topic of self-improvement will be examined through some significant examples of improvement or enhancement in the context of sports and movement cultures since the beginning and subsequent diffusion of modern sports. It will be demonstrated how the practices, the participants, the motives, the meanings, the discourses and the social and political circumstances have changed.

Thereto, the main focus will be on examples and source material from (Western) Europe and, especially from Germany and Austria. The study cannot deliver a complete history of physical improvement practices from 1900 until today. Thus, it will carry out just three significant examples: First, 'Athletic Training': The first example which will be examined gives an overview of the gradual development of modern, scientifically based training around 1900. The establishment of a systematic rational physical regime of improvement (called athletic training) is of significant importance because it is in the heart of modern sports and was spread all over the world. And it is far more than just body techniques. It has, in some aspects, become a central metaphor for improvement in general as we can see, for example, in the aspects of 'management training' or 'training of social skills'. Second, 'Sport-for-All': The second example relates to the sport for all movement during the 1970s. For many reasons, the 1970s marked a key period in the development of physical self-improvement. This period is of extraordinary importance because, at that time, a radical extension and diversification in and of sports took place. It brought the 'formation of the large number' of people. That meant not only a radical change of the composition and enormous rise of the number of participants in sports but also a change concerning the motives or the degree of obligation in keeping the body fit. As a specific example, the Austrian Fit Campaign and – very similar in many aspects – the German 'Trimm-dich-durch-Sport-Movement' shall be analyzed. Third, 'Post-Fordist Fitness Movement': The third example shows – based on the developments during the 1970s – how a post-Fordist fitness movement with changing practices and discourses under neoliberal circumstances arose. The most recent outcomes can be found, for instance, in the so-called 'Quantified-Self-Movement'.

## Aspects of the Theoretical Concept of Self-Improvement In and Through Sports

If we ask for improvement or self-improvement of the body in and with the help of sports, we must always also implicitly ask, ‘Who decides about the body?’. What kind of physical technique is socially accepted or what techniques are seen as undesirable and by whom? Thereby, we always have to ask who has the power regarding body discourses? Who decides for what purpose, what kind of physical exercise or improvement concept is important or not? Discourses and power dispositives change over time.

Michel Foucault’s theoretical concepts of biopolitics,<sup>3</sup> governmentality and especially his reflections on the ‘technologies of the self’,<sup>4</sup> provide a significant theoretical framework which can help us to better understand the historic developments. Foucault’s reflections stand, to a great extent, in the background of this approach to the topic of self-improvement through or with sports. To recall, Foucault’s very wide and already well-known definition of ‘technologies of the self’:

Technologies of the self, he postulates, ‘will allow the individual to make, by one’s own efforts or with the help of others, a series of operations on his body or his soul, his thinking, his behavior and his mode of existence, with the aim to change oneself so that he has attained a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality’.<sup>5</sup>

In and through sports? What is meant by that? Simply said, it may be distinguished between two corresponding approaches. First, sport, in a narrow understanding as performance sports, is a system in which the improvement of physical performance constitutes the centre of activity. Therefore, the main question is ‘How can one improve “natural” physical abilities in order to yield a better (externalized) physical performance?’. The second side of our considerations originates from the manner in which basic physical functions can be positively influenced or improved by physical activity and sport. How can physical activity be conducted by training or exercises in order to improve health, appearance, beauty, attractiveness or well-being? The Swiss sociologists Lamprecht and Stamm have condensed this to the following catchy formula: In competitive sports ‘I invest the body into the sport’. In fitness sport ‘I invest the sport into the body’.<sup>6</sup>

## The Invention of Modern Trainings Regimes as a Method of Self-Improvement

The origins of modern training, pertaining to physical self-improvement technique par excellence, shall be cursorily addressed in the ensuing segment. The question will be when, where and under which societal conditions modern athletic training has arisen, or has been developed.

A contemporary definition of training can be found when we look into the ‘Handbook of Athleticism’<sup>7</sup> published by the Austrian author Victor Silberer in the year 1900.<sup>8</sup> Training, it says, is the ‘systematic preparation of a living being for an exceptional physical performance, the art of reshaping a body entirely in order to allow it to accomplish the biggest physical task this body is capable of accomplishing, given its natural abilities’. Training is about the ‘systematic practice’ of physical exercises in order to perform an ‘artificial process of conversion with the body to enable this body to achieve performances as great as possible’.<sup>9</sup> In this definition, Silberer addresses key constituent parameters which had already been well

established as part of modern movement practices in England, and which can be subsumed under the term training, and mainly serve the purpose of improving physical performance and consequently a transformation of the body.

The concept, as well as the new physical practices, of 'training' first appeared on the European continent – for example, in France around 1850 and in Germany in the 'Handbook of Hygiene', written by Oesterlen in 1851.<sup>10</sup> When Silberer put training at the centre of his handbook around 1900, he could already build on comprehensive practical knowledge from England and partly even on empirically verified scientific knowledge.

The idea of achieving positive effects in regard to performance improvement using targeted movement interventions is not an innovation of modernism. On the contrary, there exist many examples from ancient agonistics and athletics as well as from the Middle Ages, in which the improvement of health or the enhancement of performance for everyday tasks, for war or for sports competitions was already described in detail.<sup>11</sup> But it was the European Enlightenment, with its early modern Cartesian world view, and the evolution of modern natural sciences that created the basis to think about the human body and its functions, its potential for development and its performance limits in a radically new way. This was the actual precondition for the emergence of modern training regimes.<sup>12</sup>

One can also find the first ideas about improving the athlete's body when looking at the development of athletic training in the motherland of sport, England, in the late eighteenth century. Carter divides the development of athletic training in England into two stages. The early stage from the end of the eighteenth century to around 1870 was essentially characterized by the oral tradition of experience and knowledge from former athletes and coaches. Intensified betting of money on the outcome of sport competitions as well as an increase of sports competitions evoked the necessity of systematic physical preparation. The 'scientific' know-how about athletic training that was passed on by the first coaches to prize fighters, athletes and rowers was experience-based knowledge handed down orally. Carter detects the first signs of science-based training in England from about 1870. Since 1870 the term 'scientific training' gradually came into being. This did not mean that the training methods were already based on scientific knowledge, rather, it meant that training was done regularly and was used as systematic preparation for competition.<sup>13</sup>

With sport emanating from England, and its specific preparation practices of training, a new rational paradigm of movement culture established itself. With it specific knowledge about shape and refinement of the human body was established. Overall there was still great uncertainty regarding the general resilience and also possible improvement capacity of the human body, despite the existence of some individual studies. Even in circles of leading physicians, it was common to criticize competitive sports. Philippe Tissié, 'the most important sports physician of the Fin de siècle',<sup>14</sup> for instance 'opposed competitive sports due to their apparent "medical dangers"',<sup>15</sup> with the alleged lack of resilience of the female body and in particular the endangerment of the ability to give birth an especially persistent theme. In the era of expansive imperialism of increased industrial productivity, finally the mechanisms of enhancement prevailed. Masculinity and especially the male body are subdued to the production logic of machines.<sup>16</sup> This mechanistic understanding transforms over the course of history. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the idea of the body as a steam engine dominated. Around 1900, this concept was replaced with the notion of the body as an electric motor.<sup>17</sup> The body, like a machine, is in service of a belief in progress and an increased industrial productivity. It is subjected to the will and

not allowed to tire anymore. One of the key utopian dreams of the late nineteenth century was the release of unlimited powers by the human being. The strengthened, trained body entered the centre of the 'bourgeois efforts to shape and exploit the world through rational and productive work'.<sup>18</sup>

The parcelling of the body, a reductionistic and mechanistic point of view, as well as the operationalization of some emphasized and specific parameters, influenced physical practices. Chronologically, the beginnings of modern occupational medicine and sports medicine as well as exercise physiology but also kinetics, lie here.<sup>19</sup>

Starting c. 1880, numerous works deal with the efficient energy use of athletes. Studies on the endurance of competitive cyclists emerge in France, Germany and Austria. Eisenberg refers to the fact that in Germany, many natural scientists turn towards sport and frequently made it the subject of their scientific research.<sup>20</sup> Physicians, chemists or occupational physiologists in Europe and in the USA often underwent self-experimentation, conducting anthropometric, electrocardiographic, respiratory or X-ray examinations on themselves.<sup>21</sup> Out of these scientific research approaches, a new independent field of research, a scientific-oriented sport science, developed in Germany even before the First World War. The study of performance limits of the human body had become a focal point of interest.

Now a new type of body emerged, the athlete's body. Based on the ancient world, the athlete becomes the prototype for strength, speed and endurance as well as for unlimited human performance, and resilience, but also 'shapeability',<sup>22</sup> self-production and self-design. The athlete's body is an analogue for industrial and economic productivity.

## Enhancement as Paradigm and Individual Obligation

All this took place in close allegiance with a highly complex dynamic overall social transformation process, which was especially promoted by the male members of the rising bourgeoisie. Here, I will merely point to this process by referring to a few key words: Forced industrialization, the observance of Taylorism in commodity production, rationalization and acceleration of almost all areas of life, or the emergence of the bourgeoisie as a new hegemonic class with all its specific values and attitudes.<sup>23</sup> Terms such as machine age, industrial system, age of technology or factory system refer to a dynamic development encompassing all areas of life.<sup>24</sup>

Regarding the body, it is necessary to state that there is a fundamental radical departure from the prototype of a corpulent body towards a slender dynamic body, which is achieved with the help of establishing mechanisms of self-control, such as diets, bathroom scales, sport and training.

A basic scheme for the optimization of the body assumed that, broadly speaking, only those who were able to meet the standards of the modern civil work ethic could make and hold their bodies lean, fit and productive with athletic training. More fundamentally, around 1900 a culture of physiologic performance assessment and performance control beyond sport established itself, which in many cases has created a constantly reaching, unquestioned, highly attractive concept of adequacy and performance.<sup>25</sup>

From the turn of the century onwards, an additional instrument for increasing self-control was the weighing scales. In the urban bourgeoisie of the late nineteenth century, the daily weight measurement became gradually popular.<sup>26</sup> The origins of the discussion about normal weight lie in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1868, the French



physician and anthropologist Paul Broca invented the so called 'Broca formula' as a first clue to the determination of the so-called normal weight.<sup>27</sup>

Until the mid-nineteenth century, the investigation of energetic processes was on the agenda of European doctors. In 1856, the English physician Edward Smith developed a portable spirometer, which he used for measurements observed during fast walking or on a treadmill. In 1854, the German physiologist Karl von Vierordt (1818–1884) invented a prototype for measuring the pulse, a first so-called spiograph. In the year 1860, the Frenchmen Étienne-Jules Marey (1830–1904), 'possessed by the ideas of motion analysis throughout his life',<sup>28</sup> improved this spiograph crucially in Paris and hence for the first time a measurable heart rate reading – verifiable in the field – was available.

Soon the so-called ergometry was at the centre of clinical diagnostic research. Whereby, it was not the improvement of the athletic performance which woke the interest of physicians at first, but the measurement and enhancement of the performance in the work process. For almost a century, the controversial debate about the so-called athlete's heart had been linked inseparably with intensified cardiovascular research. As early as 1899, the Finnish physician Henschen described systematically occurring heart enlargements, which are caused predominantly by endurance exercises. Clinical observations of endurance athletes let him conclude 'that this, through sport, enlarged heart can do more work than the normal one and that there is a physiologic heart enlargement as a consequence of sport'.<sup>29</sup>

Around 1910, a milestone in the study of physical performance was achieved. Arthur Mallwitz and others developed the so-called 'sport medical laboratory' on the occasion of the first international hygiene exhibition in Dresden allowing anthropometric, exercise physiological and radiological functional examinations to be conducted on athletes. The laboratory was directly linked to the stadium so that competitors could be examined in the course of their training process.<sup>30</sup>

An additional important line of the discourse in the attempt for optimization at the intersection of sport and science was anthropometry. In the late nineteenth century, a veritable obsession developed for measuring the human body and its body parts and to derive all kinds of typologies therefrom. One goal amongst others was to define a prototypical normal body. Darwinist theories, racial and hereditary ideologies often formed the intellectual roots of these anthropometric efforts. The Austrian sport pioneer Victor Silberer even dedicated a whole chapter of more than 40 pages to the 'physical exercises from the standpoint of Darwinist theories' in his 'Handbook of Athleticism'. Silberer advocated for physical exercises and sport as a means of eugenics.<sup>31</sup>

## Conclusion: A Brief Interim Result

What could be shown is that before the First World War, many rational and systematic attempts to improve human performance and the human body were made. Rational mechanisms and principles of improvement, enhancement and optimization in sports and with sports in a very broad sense of the term had already been established by this time.

The rise of British sports and its system of rational training are deeply linked with the rise of industrial modernity and its inherent logics of permanent growth and increase but also with the ascent of the middle class. In the logic of the athlete's training, the social ascent of the middle class is symbolically and manifestly real. But what must be emphasized, in that

context, is that the consequences for movement training and access to sports for men and women remained extremely different.

Nonetheless, we should not imagine that the enhancement of the (male) athletic body was without exception. There is the example of Arnold Strode-Jackson, the 1500 metres Olympic champion of 1912 who still held to the amateur ideal and apparently trained only occasionally. As Carter notes, Strode-Jackson was 'Educated at a public school and then Oxford' and 'his approach to training was casual, consisting mainly of massage, golf and walking'.<sup>32</sup> However, this typically British amateur approach towards sport had no future. The increasing internationalization of sport, the establishment of the Olympic movement, the heightened importance of sport performances for national pride, the fear of not being able to persist in the competition of nations paired with imperialism and social Darwinist ideas led to an additional boost of rationalization and systematization in sporting practices. Adding to this, was that (especially within US-American sports culture competition) the preparation, coaching and the training of athletes was being conducted with the Taylorist methods of 'scientific management' which, in the end, led to (for Europeans) the shocking result that the USA won 13 of a possible 20 gold medals in athletics at the 1908, London Olympic Games.<sup>33</sup>

### **'Sport-for-All' – Between Self- and External-Activation**

The second example shows a radical extension of the traditional performance sports. It takes place in Western Europe during the 1970s and it lays the foundation for the development of modern physical fitness culture. This is a mighty leap in time from 1900 to the 1970s. A long period of time which would have offered several other interesting and important examples of sports and movement cultures with specific concepts of improving the body, though not examined here. Yet, by way of citing a couple of salient examples, one may mention the complex ideological concept of worker sports and its ambivalent practical realization. Or the specifics of the national socialist sports with its totalitarian concept of the 'people's sports' (popular sports – 'Volk in Leibesübungen' as it was called in Germany).

But there are some arguments which justify a special focus on the development of sports culture during the 1970s. At least in Europe, this was a key period in the establishment of a new culture of physical self-improvement. With the beginning of the 1970s, a radical change of sports and movement culture began. It brought the extension of the hegemonic, male dominated, traditional ascetic performance-oriented amateur sports which was practiced predominately in sports clubs. And it brought the invention of the so-called 'second way' in sports, the popular sports or mass sports (or 'Breitensport' in German). A key element in this transformation process is the understanding of the sport-for-all initiatives which firstly started in the Scandinavian countries,<sup>34</sup> and were then adopted and adapted by Germany and Austria. All this was based on the experience of fitness initiatives and outcomes of scientific research, especially from the United States during the 1950s. A strong physical fitness movement had already been established in the United States during this period, which had then slowly spread to Europe.<sup>35</sup>

The establishment of that physical fitness movement can be interpreted mainly as a reaction to the living conditions of the technically highly developed American society. The fear of lifestyle diseases like having a stroke but also the fear of military impairment were the main arguments.<sup>36</sup> At the end of the 1950s similar arguments were publicly expressed



in Germany and also in Austria.<sup>37</sup> Sport officials and scientists argued for higher sports participation among the population.

The first ideas or even concepts of 'mass sports' or 'sports-for-all' appeared. Triggers for those new ideas were radical changes in European post-war society. The worst consequences of the Second World War were overcome. The lifestyle of the people and the ability of consumption had been enormously improved. And the two most important facts were the decline of physical work, and parallel to that, the increase of leisure time.

We can find more and more public debates about physical degeneration of the whole population, complaints about deficits of movement and absence of physical stress. These complaints were not only ideological or theoretical debates. There were real changes within industrial work, agriculture and daily mobility. Two figures illustrate this. In 1950, the number of private cars in Austria was calculated at 50,000, and only 10 years later it had already risen to 404,000 cars. In Germany, the situation was quite similar. The second example is the noticeable reduction of working hours. In 1975, men worked 11 hours (and women 10 hours) less than in the 1950s.<sup>38</sup> This was a radical change and a deep, noticeable alteration of people's everyday life. For the first time, one could feel what 'leisure society' meant. The Austrian historian Karazman-Morawetz says that besides working life a new 'private life strand' ('Lebensstrang') emerged.<sup>39</sup>

In Germany, the sports organizations and sports authorities at the end of the 1960s began to develop a model which was called the 'second way' ('Der zweite Weg'). The second way offered new settings of sports to people who previously did not participate in sports, especially children, women and the elderly. The goal was to increase the number of participants in sports. Summarizing it can be stated that the initiatives under the label 'second way' radically opened sports to new groups and broke up the narrow structures and norms of the traditional performance-oriented sports of the post-war era. A totally new understanding of how physical activity, movement or sports should function within societies at the peak of the industrial modernity arose.

In Austria, a similar development took place. Sports authorities started a National Fitness Campaign – very similar to the German 'Trimm-dich-durch-Sport-movement'. On the example of this Fitness Campaign, it can – among others – be shown how the transformation from the Fordist sports culture to post-Fordist fitness culture progressed.

### **The Austrian National Fitness Campaign in the 1970s**

The campaign started on 26 October 1971. It was the biggest mass sports event in Austrian history so far. Approximately 150,000 people participated in the 'National Fit Walk and Run'. The name of the campaign was 'Fit mach mit' ('Join us for Fitness').<sup>40</sup> At the centre of the whole campaign was the National Fit Walk and Run on the national holiday, 26 October. The state broadcasting company supported the initiative with an intense media campaign with thousands of promotion spots close to prime time without demanding money for that exclusive advertising. A goal was to mobilize as many people as possible: 'We must reach the big mass which is physically absolutely inactive. That is what is important'.<sup>41</sup> An important decision was the choice of the national holiday, the 26 October. So the whole campaign was intensely connected with a certain feeling of citizens' duty. This was also emphasized by an appeal by the president of the republic the day before.

In the year 1971, the campaign started with 150 single events all over Austria. The distance which had to be covered was around 10 kilometres (depending on local circumstances it could be modified from eight to 10 kilometres) either running or walking. During the 1970s, the National 'Fit Walks and Runs' became the biggest mass sports events in Austria but also in Central Europe. Thus, the result is obvious: Sports participation of the Austrian population increased strongly within the period from 1970 to 1980.<sup>42</sup> This period is kind of a take-off-phase in the process of the sportification of Austrian society.

### **The National Fitness Campaign Within the Transformation Process of Sports in Western European Societies**

Since then this type of sports event has slightly been adapted over the decades, but does still exist today. If we want to understand the importance and meaning of this fitness event, we have to consider it against the background of the general fitness sport and sport-for-all-movement in Central and Western Europe during that period. The transformation of modern sports cultures at the transition from Fordist to post-Fordist accumulation regimes has become a topic in recent analyses. Graf,<sup>43</sup> and Bänzinger,<sup>44</sup> focus especially on the fit body and its relations to general changes in society like pluralization and individualization of all spheres of life. Others emphasize fitness sport as a subsystem of sport. One important aspect in that context is, in any case, the question of self-control of the body. In this respect, it is to ask how ideals of being fit and staying fit have become hegemonial in society and how fitness practices have been adopted by individuals.

The Austrian Fitness campaign began in the year 1971. This is the climax of the Fordist economic regime. It is assumed that some elements (like contents, goals or structures) of the fitness campaign still show characteristics of Fordist body culture and on the other hand already show elements of post-Fordist body culture. The Austrian Fitness campaign was a top down intervention. The target group was the whole population. The programme had two characteristics: one is the opening and diversification of the traditional club sports. The second one is the specific access to the body.

If we follow Michel Foucault's concept of 'Biopolitics' and additionally the theorists of post-Fordist subjectivation theory, like Bröckling, Kreisky, Baumann, Graf, Hägele,<sup>45</sup> and so on, we can – put simply – assume that the main difference between Fordist and post-Fordist body intervention or body control is that the power which controls the body shifted from the centre (state, school, military, etc.) to the individual. That means that self-control and self-monitoring became more and more common. The historian Graf postulates that 'fitness is a guiding theme for the constitution of the post-fordist subject. Fitness in post-fordism is a body practice which is situated between self-submission and self-empowerment'.<sup>46</sup> What are the main differences between Fordist and post-Fordist techniques of the building of a fit body? Following Graf, one answer is: 'The (bio-)political access to the body depends more on the individual and is more perfect'.<sup>47</sup> The control of the body shifted from a 'repressive' type of control to a more 'stimulating control' as Foucault points out.<sup>48</sup> State concepts or semi-state concepts of public health are more and more accomplished by individuals. The fitness athlete becomes a 'self-entrepreneur' who achieves leanness, health and performance capability.

Simply put, responsibility, control and consequences for, and of, physical activities or non-activities shift consequently towards individuals. The Austrian fitness campaign (and

also very similar other European sport-for-all-approaches) at the beginning of the 1970s – at the climax of Fordism – intervened in a form of mass didactics between self and external regulation. The main instrument was the appeal. The appeal is a type of communication somewhere between plea, command or persuasion. In this way, parts of the population were influenced to get physically active. The degree of obligation was small. No sanctions existed if one did not participate. The setting as a whole did not put pressure on the people but instead of this worked with a kind of pedagogical appeal for becoming active.<sup>49</sup> Men and women as ‘good citizens’ should participate in the National Fit Walk. Thus, the National Fit Walks and Runs still remain in the tradition of modern mass sport events, like ‘Volksübung’ (‘national sports, national exercise’). They remain somehow in the semantics of the ‘people’s corpus’ (‘Volkskörper’). However, the appeal for ‘self-activity’ already refers to post-modern body culture. Thereby, self-improvement or enhancement were not a priority. As a first step, being active in any way is required. It is an appeal for self-activism and for self-initiative. The National Austrian Fit Walk and Fit-Run-movement – and the German Trimm-movement functioned in a quite similar way – they mark a shift towards self-activity. They are like a missing link, a hybrid between modern and post-modern fitness culture. This was exactly the shifting point to self-regulation and self-responsibility.

### Post-Fordist Fitness Regimes, 1980–2000

After the ‘sport-for-all’ movement in the 1970s, a ‘second’ big fitness movement became even more established in the 1980s and 1990s. With that, a certain obviousness for ideas of health-related practices took place. As shown before, the 1970s were a turning point in Austria and Germany, but also in many other central and western European countries. Doing sports went from practicing it in the traditional way in sports-clubs or sports-teams, to practicing differentiated types of ‘recreational or popular sports’, which means exercising by one’s self without having to be a member of any team or a club.

In the 1980s, the term ‘fitness’ was not about going for a short jog anymore. Doing fitness activities became something like a new key currency for the ‘high performers’ and for those who were dedicated to improve their performance. That included working hard on one’s own body. It was none other than the American fitness-pioneer Jane Fonda, who initialized the boom for aerobics in the western, industrialized countries. For her, aerobics was about ‘feeling the burn’ which indicated that the times of ‘physical liberation and heart health’ were over and a new age of ‘hard labour and accomplishment’, was beginning, also known as ‘working out’.<sup>50</sup>

In Germany, doing aerobics boomed in the 1980s and followed the American example. Instructions for aerobic coaches were provided and standardized, and more and more gyms (but also traditional sports clubs) offered aerobic classes. By the end of the 1980s, aerobics became established thanks to an expanding audience. Aerobics was a physical praxis which especially appealed to women. They hoped to reduce body weight and also to obtain a more attractive physique and a healthy body. The idea of presenting their own fit body became more and more important, not only during leisure time but also at, and for, work. Having a fit body and presenting it offered an ‘authentic’ method to represent values, such as self-discipline and a sense of responsibility. Doing sports was not about having a fit body to stay healthy anymore – the fit body was seen as a tool with which one has the opportunity to show an opponent what one is capable of doing. It became important that the trained body

was not only visible to oneself, but especially to others. The self-manufactured, obviously fit body, became a kind of 'bio stock' on the market place of sexual attractiveness as well as in the competitive struggles of business and everyday life: 'Visible musculature was worn like a suit of armor'.<sup>51</sup>

In 1988, a study analyzing the status of gyms in Vienna was conducted and published. The author, Roland Bässler characterized the situation in the following way:

Fitness with all its components provides the basis for a successful life. Doing Fitness strengthens the body, is fun and provides a sense of well-being. It helps people to grow in confidence, be successful at their job and it makes people feel more erotic, because a fit body is often associated with an increased virility.<sup>52</sup>

Fitness training obtained an enormous importance during the 1980s in Europe. This also finds expression in a boost of commercialization. From 1984 to 1986, most of Germany's fitness studios were established.<sup>53</sup> A similar development can be found in Austria where the sport sociologist Bässler detects a 'fitness wave' in exactly the same period. In 1990, there were 4100 fitness studios with 1.7 million members in Germany. In the city of Vienna, Austria, 83 commercial fitness studios had already been established by 1988.<sup>54</sup> Fitness studios with highly personalized programs had been set up alongside the traditional sports clubs. Doing fitness had become self-evident for many people in Europe during the 1980s. The 'awareness of the need for physical activity' and exercise as a form of leisure was seen as normal by more and more people.<sup>55</sup>

### **Total Fitness, Conclusions, Outlook, Questions**

After 2000, new types and settings of physical activities arose. What comes to mind are all these specific developments like the new techniques of self-surveillance and self-improvement which we face, for example in the 'QS-Movement',<sup>56</sup> which was started in 2007 by the American Wired-Journalists Gary Wolf and Kevin Kelly or the economically extremely successful software programs like 'Runtastic',<sup>57</sup> or fitness-apps like 'freelatics'.<sup>58</sup>

If we put the focus again on the problem of self-regulation of physical activities, what can we learn so far from the history of the physical fitness movement about these new developments? What questions can we pose and what answers can we get? Is there a new 'age-of-life logging',<sup>59</sup> which is characterized by recording almost all aspects arising from our everyday life? As the German sociologist Stefan Selke postulates, 'Never before people had such a deep mirror to look into. That mirror consists of the new digital technologies which serve the self-survey, the self-observation and self-optimization'.<sup>60</sup> Are all these digital devices which permanently produce terra bit of data about the shape of our bodies and even about our mental state, signs of a new age of self-improvement, or are they not just negligible gimmicks of some technophile fitness enthusiasts? Additionally, the question of self-control remains unanswered. Do we reach a higher degree of autonomy with all these new bodily technologies of the self with their vast diversity between health-, fitness- or risk-sports, with the general increments of individual degrees of freedom, or do we just submit ourselves to the 'dictation of the neo-liberal appeal of self-care'?<sup>61</sup>

## Notes

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8. Silberer (1846–1924) was the most important promoter of modern sports in the monarchy of the Habsburg. He tremendously and lastingly popularized sport in the Danube Monarchy and beyond that in the whole German speaking region not least via his comprehensive journalistic opus. The anglophile athlete and publicist Silberer published in the year 1900 – the year of the second Modern Olympic games – a 'Handbook of Athleticism' in Vienna, in a city in which, up to that point, only a few did sports alongside the German gymnastics.
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21. Hoberman, *Sterbliche Maschinen*, 14–22.
22. Sarasin, *Reizbare Maschinen*, 325.
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30. Hollmann in *Sportmedizin und Sportwissenschaft*, 25–32; Michael Krüger, 'History of Sports Medicine in Germany' (unpublished paper presented at the NASSH Conference, Miami, 2015). In that context the work of Dudley A. Sargent (1849–1924) at Harvard University should be mentioned.
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## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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