competing ideological positions about bodies and their environments are aestheticised. The spaces and settings of the gymnasium materialise Michel Foucault’s conception of an ‘architecture that would be operative in the transformation of individuals’: places that shape matter and have a performative action on whatever inhabits them, imposing this on their occupants. Architecture plays a formative role in shaping the transactional environments through which subjects come under constant transformation and negotiation. Yet surprisingly little has been written on the architecture and interior design of the contemporary fitness gymnasium. Existing scholarship stresses the standardisation of equipment, bodily movement and fitness parameters, going as far as to suggest that ‘fitness centres have developed into more or less standardised locations worldwide.’

We caution against extending the standardisation of bodily movement that is found in, say, the popular Les Mills Fitness programme and its concomitant equipment, to the architecture of gymnasiums. We observe instead that today’s commercial fitness gymnasiums are extraordinarily diverse and knowing in their aesthetic differentiation. Indeed, gymnasium operators and their architects, like the crowd of ‘individuals’ in Monty Python’s Life of Brian, all insist on their vision ‘for an extremely different gym to anything we have seen,’ or claim to offer something unique, including even, the ‘anti-gym.’

Gymnasiums are more than neutral infrastructure or crystallisations of social practices and systems of thought. They are critical sites wherein competing ideological positions about bodies and their environments are aestheticised. The spaces and settings of the gymnasium materialise Michel Foucault’s conception of an ‘architecture that would be operative in the transformation of individuals’: places that shape matter and have a performative action on whatever inhabits them, imposing this on their occupants. Architecture plays a formative role in shaping the transactional environments through which subjects come under constant transformation and negotiation. Yet surprisingly little has been written on the architecture and interior design of the contemporary fitness gymnasium. Existing scholarship stresses the standardisation of equipment, bodily movement and fitness parameters, going as far as to suggest that ‘fitness centres have developed into more or less standardised locations worldwide.’

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The global real estate of gymnasium brands has grown exponentially in the last decade, each brand
and Richard Pringle argue, ‘gyms are designed to discipline… bodies towards normalcy’, towards the ideal male (increased muscularity) or female (thin and toned) body.\(^7\) Or, as Barry’s Bootcamp trainer Andy Lee proclaims, the ideal body is one that is ‘lean, toned, strong’.\(^8\) In pursuit of this medical and cosmetic ideal, gymnasium attendance has increased across all classes, ages and genders in the developed world over the past two decades. Physical conditioning has a psychical effect. The gym-goer’s moods, thoughts, and self-perception are altered. An enhanced sense of self-determination and agency is developed as individuals work to overcome pain, exhaustion, sloth and boredom. The ways in which gym-goers are perceived by others changes too, especially through the entanglement of self-fashioning and self-representation that takes place most intensely through social media.\(^9\) Securing the approval (and desire) of others is just one of the ways that gymnasium environments contribute to the shaping of selves.

Indoor gymnasiums arose simultaneously with the prison, asylum and the schoolhouse ‘in the context of a spatial disciplining and the functionalisation of social life.’\(^10\) The gymnasium has since departed from these ‘total institutions’ as Irving Goffman characterised them in Asylums (1961) – where inmates are committed against their will and new identities imposed upon them. The gym has escaped the schoolyard and reattached itself symbolically and sometimes literally to spaces of leisure, hospitality and self-care. Gym-goers voluntarily enter into the belief ‘that they need to change, and that it is their responsibility to do so’.\(^11\) Subjects submit themselves to forms of discipline, physical contact, performance assessment, and machinic engagement that in other contexts might be construed as harassment, objectification, humiliation, or torture.\(^12\) This submission takes place in a social and political context, for the belief that one needs to get fit through structured exercise is provoked by media fat-shaming, work-based subsidies, health insurance policies,
advertising and the campaigns of gymnasiums themselves. The responsibility of self-transformation is perfectly captured by the mantra of Barry’s Bootcamp – ‘Fuck Perfection. You do YOU’ – echoing Nike’s ‘You are entirely up to you. Make your body. Make your life. Make yourself.’ 13 Having worked hard to translate their ethos succinctly, gymnasiums often inscribe these emotive images and slogans on their walls – not unlike spaces of religion. The culture of individual responsibility and voluntarism makes fitness gymnasiums extraordinarily efficient from the point of view of both their commercial operation and the state’s interests in a healthy populace, with gym-goers paying from their own pockets to perform exercises independently or in groups. The endless annual lists and reviews of ‘best’ gymnasiums by social and mainstream media influencers further stimulate the appetite for the endless reformation of bodies and subjectivities. 14

Gymnasiums also shape selves within communities. 15 Emile Durkheim posited that when people come together to perform any kind of ritual, be it dancing, singing or inscribing one another’s bodies, a sense of something beyond the self, which we might call religious feeling, is born. He called the state experienced through synchronised social and physical activities ‘collective effervescence.’ This feeling is then directed onto people or objects that, thereafter, become sacred. 16 Following Durkheim, Matylda Ciolkosz proposes that the synchronised movements of modern postural yoga, mirroring those modelled by teachers, enable greater acceptance of its philosophical notions and religious origins. 17 This may well be the case for all choreographed exercise in gymnasiums, indeed, the experience of ‘collective effervescence’ is a motivating factor for participating in group exercise at the gymnasium rather than exercising alone at home. Collective effervescence extends the ‘natural high’ of endorphins from a private experience to a one that is social. Additional rituals before and after the workout prolong its sociality. At BXR London, the collective sociality of the fitness enterprise is promoted as ‘another family where you make friends and speak about everything after you train.’ 18 Harvey Spevak, the chairman of Equinox, asserts that membership is more than access to the gym, ‘it’s a lifestyle and a community.’ 19 Gymnasiums achieve this sense of a collective through protocols and practices that elicit ritual practice among the assembled bodies of gym-goers, which include prescribed postures and actions, as well as initiation rites, performance targets, competitive and social events, post-workout commensality, bathing and grooming, membership structures, etc. Eric Chaline compares going to the gym with organised religion, noting the regularity and zeal of adherents and the fact that ‘the faithful of both church and gym travel to a separate building, wear special clothes, eat special food and take part in shared rituals that are performed with complete absorption and dedication.’ 20 Like churches, individuals are brought into (and reform themselves in accordance with) the communities and competing ideologies that characterise each gymnasium.

Chaline’s comparison between working out and organised religion is not a trivial one, for the architecture of the gymnasium constructs sometimes fantastic sensorial environments for the staging of ritualised activities. As the Barry’s Bootcamp brand puts it, ‘This is more than a pile of equipment. It’s a magical combination of instructor, lighting, music, and the people in the room... the room becomes an ecosystem of collective accomplishment.’ 21 The CEO of the Equinox fitness chain claims, ‘I tell our architects that I want people to walk into our spaces and feel a bit like they’re in a temple – not in a religious way but in a spiritual way.’ 22 We have seen such ‘collective’ accomplishment before, in the synchronous group movements ‘of geometrical exactitude’ that Siegfried Kracauer identified as the aesthetic of the ‘mass ornament.’ 23 The dances of the Tiller Girls that Kracauer fixated on were performed on empty stages, against a curtain or
of leisure practice in which work interests predomi-
nate’. Frew and McGillivray propose that ‘the
health and fitness club is the principal space where
the quest for, and attainment of, physical capital
takes place’. This means that gymnasiums are
part of the machinery of post-industrial economies.
A muscular body attained in non-work time and,
ironically, resembling the body of a pre-industrial
labourer, expresses the modern subject’s consent
to the punishing work regimes of many professions.
Professional identities are thus moulded through
engagement with gymnasiums, which is why
they are so frequently co-located with workplaces
and their membership subsidised by employers.
Amanda Waring, observing the use of health clubs
by professionals who work in London’s money
markets, describes the development and mainte-
nance of a fit and healthy body as an integral part
of ‘a project of the self’ leading to enhanced career
opportunities. As one participant in Waring’s study
suggested, boutique fitness clubs are for ‘high flyers
who want to fly that little bit higher.’

Gymnasiums targeted at high-income urban
professionals invest significantly in real estate
and in interior design. Boutique gyms commonly
use historic buildings in inner urban precincts to
conjure the atmosphere of a traditional gentleman’s
club – indeed, members of one New York gym
are exhorted to ‘Think of the Equinox Wall Street
Fitness Club as a luxurious 1920s private club.’
Equinox Wall Street is in the neoclassical Bankers
Trust Company Building, built in 1910, and one
of New York’s Designated Landmarks. [Fig. 1] A
number of high-end gyms in London do the same:
Equinox Kensington is organised around the art
deco dome of the historic Derry and Tom’s building,
a 1930s department store that was the headquar-
ters of the Biba fashion chain in the 1970s. The
Engine Room, a simulated rowing ‘studio’, is in a
Grade II listed converted church in Marylebone.

G gentrif ied gyms

Today, leisure and work are no longer antithetical.
What looks like leisure is best understood as an
extension of work. The project of the self, or what
Paul du Gay identifies as the emergence of an
‘entrepreneurial self’, is one in which individuals are
engaged in a process of perpetual self-actualisation
that is motivated by the desire to forge a successful
career. As Derek Wynne observes, ‘the domi-
nance of work as central to life produces a pattern

In the contemporary gymnasium, formations of bodies and machines are staged in more elaborate and augmented settings, but as with the Tiller Girls, the surfaces and movements of bodies become part of the performance. Mirrored surfaces multiply and enhance the spectacle of ‘mass ornament’, creating the impression of an infinite space. Gymnasiums exploit the full repertoire of experience design – scents, soundscapes and music, light shows, tactile surfaces, manipulations of air quality and movement. The main spin room at Becycle in Berlin, designed by Gotz and Bilchev in 2016, is such a space. It is a black box with acoustic standards equivalent to a recording studio, where DJs play sets at volume levels and with deep base and lighting equivalent to Berlin’s famed nightclubs. It recalls spaces of pleasure in which an ecstatic, pharmaceutical release from the pressures of working life are sought and, like them, seeks chemical changes to the body’s performance and mood. Many gymnasiums are, like Becycle, theatrically artificial and immersive – tightly wrought, even subterranean spaces, without views in or out, and with highly regulated thresholds for entry. Some manipulate air temperature, humidity, and even gaseous composition to establish a precise microworld. At SP&Co’s No. 3 Jubilee Place, the most exclusive of all London’s fitness destina-
tions, for example, the reduced levels of oxygen in an advanced altitude chamber make bodies work harder, while giving those who can afford the experience the impression they are elite athletes.
Fig. 1: Equinox Wall Street, New York. Photo: Eric Chan.
windows, and lofty interiors of the 1878 building’s former use as a market warehouse. Expansive views of the city beyond are a characteristic feature of these upmarket gymnasiums, reminding the gym-goer of the domain over which they have (or seek) mastery. The interior of Another_Space was designed by Goldstein Ween with furniture, lighting and finishes ‘more akin to those you would find in a boutique hotel than a gym’.31 Where less aspirational gyms stress the dedication of their employees to fitness instruction as a vocation, Another_Space highlights that its trainers are dancers, choreographers and actors – creative individuals with cultural capital (and concomitant precarious employment in the gig economy).32

Cultural capital is captured in a myriad of ways. At Core Collective in London, Waind Gohill and Potter Architects included a public art program in their conversion of a mansion block to a bespoke gymnasium. BLOK Shoreditch, designed by Daytrip Studio, features photography by Max Oppenheim and light installations by artist Ben Cullen Williams. Another_Space, Core Collective and their ilk wish to attract design-conscious consumers. Similarly, Equinox Bond Street in New York includes a description of the gymnasium’s architecture ahead of any information about its ethos, classes or trainers: ‘With quintessential New York attitude, the club infuses historic urban architecture with a boundary-pushing downtown vibe. Housed in a former manufacturing building, Equinox Bond Street creates a true fitness temple with a soaring 18-foot ceiling, exposed brick, arches, and Corinthian columns.’33 The interior is by architect Kara Mann, who knows her audience well – she also designed Gwyneth Paltrow’s Goop retail pop-up in the Waldorf Astoria hotel. Its Wall Street club has ‘plush, elegant’ interiors designed by David Rockwell.34 The Bond and Wall Street clubs are not, however, their most exclusive. Equinox operates ninety-six clubs, including a small set of gymnasiums for se(he)ct members in Manhattan and London who pay €135 per hour for training sessions. Extending further the submission of the subject’s intimate physiology to disciplinary regimes, entry to the exclusive ‘E clubs’ is by retina scanner, after which exercises are performed in in rooms kept at a cool eighteen degrees Celsius to minimise perspiration. At Equinox, changing room lockers are custom-built cabinetry in dark timbers and inspired one gym-goer to gush in her blog, ‘The women’s locker room is beautiful. It’s so strange to actually like a locker room but this felt and looked luxurious.’35 In fact, not so strange. Ceren Doan observes that what one buys with the higher membership fee is the opportunity to withdraw one’s body from the gaze of others. The more “fortified” physical set-up [of changing rooms] in exclusive gyms suggests that “upper-class bodies” are to be handled more discreetly than other bodies and are entitled to more privacy and protection.36

Upmarket gyms work hard to transform the anxieties and shame some associate with nudity in public into a more gentle, sensual frisson. Yearning and desire are transferred to rain shower heads, frosted glass doors, marble surfaces, hot fluffy towels, and expensive hair and beauty products. All because, as Doan says, ‘due to the assemblage of naked and semi-naked bodies in this confined, shared arena the body and its function become a delicate matter.’37

Gymnasium changing rooms are where beautiful bodies are not so much vehicles for success at work as they are the critical ingredient to attracting the gaze of potential sexual partners. Sex at the gym, rather than sex attributed to one’s dedication to the gym, has stimulated a prurient media interest despite sanitary laws in most nations barring sexual activity in gymnasiums. The David Barton Gyms in 1990s and 2000s New York were famous as places where ‘drag queens worked out in platform heels’ and the ‘locker rooms doubled as hook-up joints.’38
as a signifier of social position. Forms of leisure activity have been shown to convey social class or status. Contemporary gymnasiuums, however, freely appropriate a broad spectrum of leisure and labour practices from across societal and historical divisions. The gym-goer carries out acts of choreographed exertion, often borrowed from boxing and wrestling, or, as we will see in Crossfit, submits to laborious activities such as moving truck tires like a mechanic or climbing rope ladders like a stevedore. Gymnasiums intended for white-collar professionals uphold the erotic and exotic musculature of the labouring body as an ideal, and occupy the spaces of the underclasses, formerly the domain of dissidents and outsiders. Such gymnasiums participate in the gentrification of cities that further the disappearance of industry from their midst, but do so in ways that suggest they are unaware of or indifferent to the paradox. Soho House in Chicago, for example, occupies a former belting factory, while boasting that the leather boxing equipment in its gymnasium and professional boxing ring was fabricated by the city’s last tannery.

The same tensions can be found in Crossfit gymnasiums, referred to by adherents as ‘boxes’. Typically occupying the expansive structures and free volumes of former warehouses, factories and garages, these spaces appear to operate almost as-found. [Fig. 2] At SuperForce Crossfit, Porte Alegra, Brazil, the architects Grupo Nuvem designed the fit-out for the former car workshop so that the industrial character of the building seamlessly integrates with Crossfit’s signature colours of red and black. A car balance has been preserved and co-opted as support for the ropes. Raw timber palettes are employed as seating. Rings and ropes hang from steel beams, scaffold structures and suspended frames are affixed to walls, all of which provide the metaphysical structures for corporeal exertion. There are few machines because, as Crossfit’s founder, Greg Glassman

Barton’s most ‘nightclubby’ gym, according to the New York Times, in the former McBurney YMCA, had a fibre-optic light show in the steam room and was the subject of a legal suit by a member who alleged ‘emotional distress’ from witnessing sex there. More recently, Equinox Wall Street was subject to an allegation by an employee that he was dismissed after reporting a valued client had masturbated in the steam room. The relationship between gay communities and identities and fitness gymnasiuums has been comprehensively described in Erick Alvarez’s Muscle Boys: Gay Gym Culture (2010). The relationship between heterosexual communities and gym culture, on other hand, has been studied primarily in terms of gendered exercise regimes, overlooking the ways in which gyms spawn interpersonal and intimate relationships. We suggest that, while etiquette and the narcissism of self-fashioning discourage gym-goers from interrupting each other’s exercise routines to socialise, the addition of cafes (juice and shake bars), bars serving alcohol, spas and jacuzzis, clothing shops, and lounges, promotes the pursuit of extracurricular relationships between gymgoers. We observe that the more exclusive the gymnasium, the more extensive are its pre- and post-workout services and spaces. Indeed, reversing the provision of a gymnasium in a hotel, in 2018 Equinox launched a chain of luxury boutique hotels for health-conscious travellers to complement and extend its fitness brand.

**Labouring bodies**

Questions of class and professional status are not, however, as simple as a quick review of those gymnasiums that deploy luxury amenities and motifs might at first suggest. It is not the case that the professional classes only attend gymnasiums like the ones discussed above while the less well-off lift, push and pull weights in low-rent garages. Throughout the course of the twentieth century, numerous sociologists, from Max Weber to Georg Simmel to Pierre Bourdieu, studied the use of leisure as a signifier of social position. Forms of leisure activity have been shown to convey social class or status. Contemporary gymnasiuums, however, freely appropriate a broad spectrum of leisure and labour practices from across societal and historical divisions. The gym-goer carries out acts of choreographed exertion, often borrowed from boxing and wrestling, or, as we will see in Crossfit, submits to laborious activities such as moving truck tires like a mechanic or climbing rope ladders like a stevedore. Gymnasiums intended for white-collar professionals uphold the erotic and exotic musculature of the labouring body as an ideal, and occupy the spaces of the underclasses, formerly the domain of dissidents and outsiders. Such gymnasiums participate in the gentrification of cities that further the disappearance of industry from their midst, but do so in ways that suggest they are unaware of or indifferent to the paradox. Soho House in Chicago, for example, occupies a former belting factory, while boasting that the leather boxing equipment in its gymnasium and professional boxing ring was fabricated by the city’s last tannery.

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tension within the locus of the Crossfit box as a site of sociability and togetherness. Crossfit boxes eschew mirrored surfaces, favouring the gaze of the group over self-surveillance: embodied regimes of mutual surveillance allow the monitoring of their relative progress towards shared goals.

Pain and pleasure

The fetishisation of industrial spaces and machines in the fitness sector speaks to a nostalgia for a time when bodily strength in the workplace was more than symbolic, yet gymnasiums also self-consciously and theatrically play with the history of re-appropriation of industrial sites by squatters and artists, for underground clubs, raves and illicit activities. Labouring bodies and industrial spaces hold an appeal that in gymnasium culture shades into the realm of sado-masochistic fantasy. The epigraph ‘If you love me, be cruel to me’ stems from the 1870 novel *Venus in Furs* by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (1835–1895). A contemporary of Sacher-Masoch, the nineteenth-century psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing subsequently coined the words ‘masochism’ and its counterpart ‘sadism’. Medical literature describes masochism as a kind of (sexual) perversion that is premised on a wish to suffer pain, humiliation, and even torture. Brewis and Linstead qualify the paradoxical nature of sadomasochism, for ‘it seeks to disorganise, to transgress, to shatter, but in a disciplined and regulated fashion’. Masochism is not confined to the bedroom/dungeon, it can be found in other arenas. Carl Cederstrom and Rickard Grassman, for example, describe a punishing form of corporate culture wherein employees loathe the work they do and are well aware of their misfortunate situation, but derive some form of enjoyment from suffering. It is easy to extrapolate such reflexive masochism to the fitness gymnasium, where the coupling of pain and pleasure is celebrated and intensified by the co-presence of other participants and the punishing demands of instructors.
Fig. 2: Typical Crossfit box. Photo: Josefina Casals.

Fig. 3: Crossfit occupies the street outside their box in San Antonio. Photo: Mark Bonica.
Observers have likened the machinery of the gymnasium – the treadmills, exercise bikes and weight machines – to instruments of torture such as the rack, the wheel, the cross and the cage. At the flagship premises of the Rebel brand at Broadgate and St Mary’s Axe in London, both designed by Studio C102, the references to the sado-masochistic dungeon extend beyond exercise machines. Subscribers attend classes led by trainers that Rebel gleefully describes as ‘the people you love to hate.’ The Broadgate venue, licensed to serve alcohol, is marketed as ‘dark, underground and dangerous’. Entry to the space is through a PVC strip welding curtain, beyond which Rebel’s neon logo visibly beckons. Service pipes and ductwork are conspicuously exposed. Changing rooms position client lockers of galvanised steel or copper alongside vintage barbers’ chairs. All is washed with theatre-grade blue or red lighting. This theatrical staging of a post-industrial, almost post-apocalyptic aesthetic, manifests at Rebel’s St Mary’s Axe venue, with its reclaimed industrial light fittings from a communist-era Polish ceramics factory and a 1960s German cargo ship. To achieve an uneven quality to the floors at both venues, concrete was poured on different days and the floor left exposed for weeks before sealing with wax to gain a further patina.

The links between suffering and pleasure are even more pronounced in the architecture of those gymnasiums centred around martial arts. BXR, Marylebone, London, features an industrial chic aesthetic that combines backlit dark-tinted mirrors, bronze detailing, and raw concrete walls with murals by street artist Ben Slow. Partition screens are woven from braided leather made in Italy and resembling whips. A steam room is lined in cool grey marble and mosaic tiles. The space is focused on an elevated boxing ring and the gymnasium’s founder, Olia Sardarova, boasts that while half the trainers have qualifications in sports science or nutrition, the other half are professional fighters. Instead of fixating on screens, people on the treadmills watch the athletes in the ring, thus experiencing the pain of exertion while vicariously and voyeuristically enjoying the pain boxers inflict on each other. A similar focus on an elevated boxing ring can be found at The Burrow Life, located on a thousand square metre industrial site close to the airport in Kuwait. Its core classes are in Muay Thai kickboxing. Burrow Life’s coaches – eleven men and two women – are fighters from Russia, Kenya, Spain, Greece, Panama, Iran, France, the UK and the United States. The interiors, designed by Lab100 Design Studio in 2015, are enclosed by walls of split concrete blocks, the roughness of which repels touch. A feature wall is of polished steel, floors are black vinyl and a spiral staircase is black steel. The training spaces are all top lit, creating a subterranean atmosphere. The Burrow homepage features a moody, dark and erotic film, in which men’s bodies are sensuously cropped. The camera slowly pans on rivulets of sweat and close-ups of limbs entangled in combat and engorged muscle flash across the screen. Still images on the website include a close-up of a pair of men’s hands inserting acupuncture needles into a muscular and tattooed bicep. Another still, of the changing room, is taken from floor level as though the photographer was lying prostrate on the tiles.

Wellness
Considered essential to the construction of an identity of personal achievement and/or success, labour force self-monitoring is today an essential precondition of capital accumulation. This form of biopolitical self-governance is perhaps most overtly expressed in the now ubiquitous organizational focus on health. As David Harvey observes, under capitalism sickness is defined as an inability to work. Gymnasium goers make an overt commitment to wellness and, thus, to work. The outcome is literally wrought upon the body, at the same time as one’s status at work is potentially enhanced. The medicalisation of fitness is most apparent in the
appropriation of clinical tropes. These seem, at first, to track in two directions – alternative or holistic medicine, and science-based western medicine. The first is characterised by plants and greenery, ‘oriental’ and exotic artefacts, burning incense, and neat rows of yoga mats. The second by hygienic white surfaces, stainless steel details, and a lack of ornamentation. Closer inspection finds the two directions increasingly blurred.

Lauren Bird notes that while yoga studios are spaces for secular fitness, unlike other gymnasiums they are often decorated with religious icons – mandalas, Tibetan prayer flags, murtis – in order to emphasise the idea of postural yoga as an antidote to the stresses of modern Western lifestyles through the integration of spirituality and traditional Hindu knowledge. The interiors of these spaces are highly contrived, albeit in a bid for authenticity. There are no machines, only mats, cushions, blocks and ropes. To facilitate stretching and ‘detoxification’, the spaces may be warmer than in other gymnasiums, particularly in Bikram hot yoga and heated Vinyasa or power yoga, where the rooms are a very warm thirty-two to thirty-seven degrees Celsius with 40 percent humidity. Music is typically quiet, tonal, and instrumental, interspersed with bird and whale song. The idea that the space itself might contribute to ‘healing’ is widely held, and best captured in the inclusion of walls of Himalayan rock salt blocks in Virgin Active’s gym in Singapore and at Total Fusion Platinum in Brisbane, Australia. The ions from the salt are supposed to calm and detoxify the body, purify the air and assist with lung capacity.

The yoga spaces that Bird focused on were not the work of architects. Upmarket yoga studios engaging architects eschew the flotsam and jetsam of touristic forms of spiritualism. At MoveYoga, Melbourne, architects Hecker Guthrie employ a minimalist aesthetic of lime-washed timber floors, paper Paris au Moi lanterns, and walls lined with vertical paper-washed pine half dowels. [Fig. 4a, 4b] Artfully placed potted plants and Japanese ceramics are set against the white walls of the former warehouse. The aesthetic is cool and bare, although the rooms themselves are infrared heated. The investment in high-end architecture at MoveYoga reflects yoga’s uptake among a wealthier, design-conscious clientele, for whom physical exercise is a process of releasing work-induced stress and the pursuit of wellness and beauty. ‘Wellness’ gymnasiums walk a delicate line between romantic evocations of nature and traditional cultures, and the techniques and imagery of advanced medicine. ‘Nature’ operates ambiguously in these settings as paradise lost and a call to one’s authentic ‘natural’ self, and manifests as ornament and scenography. At the Active Therapy Centre R3 in Barcelona, indirect artificial lighting ‘allows the lengthening of daylight hours’. In other words, nature is to be improved upon, just as the natural body is to be improved. The visual aesthetic speaks of a pre-industrial age, but atmospheres are carefully manufactured using artificial light and heating to mitigate against natural conditions. Such simulation reaches a climax at Fly, London, a yoga studio with a cinema wall onto which are projected views of wilderness places – unsullied by people – where one might vacation. [Fig. 5]

Corpor(e)al
Michel Foucault famously spoke of the ideal figure of the soldier as one that can be made ‘out of a formless clay, an inept body, the machine required can be constructed.’ As the classical age ‘discovered the body as object and target of power’ Foucault wrote that it was easy enough to find signs of the increasing attention paid to the body, ‘to the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skilful and increases its forces.’ The narrative of man-the-machine played out not only on the anatomic-metaphysical – as the focus of physicians and philosophers – but also on the techno-political register, ‘which was constituted by a whole set of regulations and by empirical
and calculated methods relating to the army, the
school and the hospital, for controlling or correcting
the operations of the body.61 Today, in contempo-
rary conditions of mediated war, the machine-like
fit soldier is functionally superfluous. This has not
deterred gymnasiums from deploying military-
themed practices and spaces.

Repurposed military training regimes that draw
on ‘the bodily techniques, rhythmic practices, and
spatial awareness developed in traditional sequest-
ered sites of military discipline’ now form ‘one of the
fastest growing sectors of a burgeoning commercial
fitness and leisure market’.62 The largest is BMF,
founded in 1999 as British Military Fitness but
rebranded Be Military Fit in 2018 when the company
was purchased by television adventurer Bear
Grylls. Their cast of ex-service members train over
thirteen thousand people weekly across 140 public
parks in the UK.63 The varied landscapes of public
parks, each with a rich social and political history,
are co-opted as if they were ready-made for mili-
tary exercises. Grassy knolls, swales and ha-ha’s
become inclined resistance surfaces, trenches and
obstacles. The unpredictability of weather serves an
atmosphere of authenticity and hostile conditions
permit the feeling of having prevailed together just
as soldiers do.64

Indoor gymnasiums must find other ways to stim-
ulate muscular bonding and simulate the hardships
of (an older style of) military experience. They do
so in a manner that relies on stylised abstractions
of natural landscapes. Planet Commando on the
outskirts of Brisbane is an adventure course-cum-
recreation centre in a former factory warehouse that
promotes a ‘unique adrenaline fitness experience.’65
Subjects are guided towards feats of mental fortitude
and physical endurance. [Fig. 6a, 6b] It was founded
by a former French SAS paratrooper, Denis Payan
who, with his family, designed and constructed a
set of obstacles, platforms and plinths from timber
logs, planks, boards and rope, that look as though
they were hastily assembled ‘ad hoc’ by ‘soldiers’.
The most distinctive quality of the construction
is the application of an over-scaled camouflage
pattern to panels and walls. Camouflage, as Jane
Tynan observes in relationship to its application in
fashion, materialises both ‘the appetite for mediated
representations of war’ and the way in which ‘fears
and desires about conflict focus on the body.’66
Camouflage corrals key components of militarist
ideologies with a mediated aesthetics at a time of
perpetual and normalised war.67 Its ubiquity in boot
camp-style gymnasiums is anything but innocent or
incidental.

Barry’s Bootcamps, or just Barry’s as it is increas-
ingly known, distort the expressive functionality of
camouflage into an architecturally-scaled wall-
paper.68 This sits as a complement to the iconic
palette of Barry’s studios, with their stark black walls
and red lighting. The red lighting is so intense and
unrelieved that Barry’s gymnasiums have hazard
tape around the machines to prevent collisions in the
barely illuminated rooms. Barry’s exploit the disin-
hibiting effect of red light and its historic association
with brothels, but more importantly signals the rela-
tionship between infra-red vision and war.69 [Fig. 7]
Rehearsing familiar regimes of bodily discipline,
Barry’s dedicate each day of the week to different
parts of the body. Tuesday, for example, is Butt and
Legs day. Barry’s explicitly disassemble and reas-
semble the body as a mitochondrially-enhanced
exquisite corpse. Barry’s body is, literally, Deleuze
and Guattari’s body without organs – decentred, in
a process of perpetual becoming.

Conclusion
In Foucault’s view, practices of the self are not
invented by subjects themselves but rather are
‘proposed, suggested and imposed on them by
one’s culture, society and social group’.70 We would
also include the assemblages of markets, machines
Fig. 4a, 4b: MoveYoga, Melbourne, views of the interior designed Hecker Guthrie. Photos: Marita Kaji-O’Grady.

Fig. 5: Fly London’s simulated views. Photo: Josiah Craven, courtesy of Fly London.
and matter that produce trans-individual effects. Whereas for Karl Marx the production process made commodities that were to be consumed by subjects, Guattari and Maurizio Lazzarato diagnose the contemporary situation as one in which the production process makes subjects and regulates desires. Capitalism produces individual subjects within pre-formed identities – boss, reckless entrepreneur, caring mother, environmental activist, sportsman – at the same time as it de-subjectifies and fragments us into component parts of a bigger assemblage, for example as data. Guattari explains, ‘it is not the facts of language use nor even of communication that generate subjectivity. On some level, subjectivity is manufactured collectively just like energy, electricity or aluminium.’ Lazzarato elaborates on Guattari’s thesis, writing:

The production of subjectivity involves expression machines that can just as easily be extra-human and extra-personal (systems that are machinic, economic, social, technological, and so forth) as they can be infra-human and infra-personal (systems of perception, memorisation and idea production, sensibility, affect, etcetera).

We have seen how the gymnasium constitutes such an extra-personal expression machine. It brings together spatial settings and architectural forms, with resistance machines and repetitive exercises, performance measurement tools and data, membership arrangements, competitions, classes and events, trainers and social hierarchies, and images of exemplary bodies and spaces that circulate through multiple communication channels. Yet, the gymnasium offers visceral experiences that can be intensely personal, even intimate. The workout may well be a transpersonal, externally-mandated process for the normalisation of the body and construction of subjectivities, but it also is one of the few spaces, outside of the bedroom, where bodies are vulnerable to each other and where human touch is exchanged. The convergence of the intimate and the institutional is possible because the body itself is at once intensely and wholly you, and a public artefact composed of distinct parts and actions that can be judged and assessed outside feeling.

The gymnasium regime requires bodies to first be understood as an assemblage of parts for repair, maintenance, improvement, and display. In turn, the architecture of the gymnasium enables assemblies of bodies and machines by operating as an open-ended, sensually-rich and symbolically-loaded ecosystem in which connections can be perpetually made and unmade. Only an open-ended, incomplete, unfinished body-in-parts is able to integrate the machine as prosthetic and partner. In the gym, while legs, lungs and a stationary bicycle convene as an assemblage for the transformation of energy into movement and muscle, a second machine, independent from the first and constituted by eyes, ears, mind, screens and headphones, consumes a curated soundtrack. A third machine takes in the trainer, the mirrored walls and the synchronised movements of all those in the spin class. It is powered by a fourth machine, of member fees, salaries, legal contracts, marketing, real estate development. The gym-goer operates without regard to this fourth machine. He moves from bicycle to changing room, touched by marble basins and tumble-dried towels, washed by heated water and scented shampoos. Each sensation, each connection is orchestrated such that commercial transactions have the seductive quality of a personal encounter. Every workout confirms her self-discipline, her moral fortitude. Each time she chooses between yoga here or cardio there, she confirms who she is, at least for now.
Fig. 6a, 6b: Interior views of Planet Commando. Photos: Planet Commando.

Fig. 7: Barry’s Bootcamp, Lafayette, New York. Photo: Author.
Hippolyte Triat opened the first of what would become a chain of commercial indoor gymnasia in a building that combined circus equipment, weights and galleries for watching groups exercise. See Van Hilvoorde, ‘Fitness: The Early (Dutch) Roots’, 1310.


Notes


5. 1Rebel homepage, accessed 2 April 2019, https://1rebel.co.uk/.


12. This has been the case since, in Liège around 1838, Hippolyte Triat opened the first of what would become a chain of commercial indoor gymnasia in a building that combined circus equipment, weights and galleries for watching groups exercise. See Van Hilvoorde, ‘Fitness: The Early (Dutch) Roots’, 1310.
29. Ibid., 300.
37. Ibid., 227.


60. Ibid., 136.

61. Ibid.


**Biographies**

Sandra Kaji-O’Grady is a professor in the School of Architecture at the University of Queensland. She co-edited *Laboratory Lifestyles* (MIT Press, 2018) and is co-author, with Chris L. Smith, of *LabOratory: Speaking of Science and its Architecture* (MIT Press, 2019). Each of these books examines the political, material and aesthetic economies of the contemporary laboratory for bioscience research. Her next book, *Pets and the City*, is concerned with the design of places wherein companion animals, especially cats and dogs, are kept in multiples, and with the intersection between this actuality and ideas about packs, hoards and pestilence.

Sarah Manderson is an Architectural graduate from the University of Queensland. Since the beginning of 2019 she has been a collaborator in Speculative Architecture, a practice that cultivates opportunities to contribute openly to the city through small institutional projects. Sarah’s research pursues productive convergences between the politics of aesthetics, the relationality of material realities, and the agency of architects to intervene actively in the cultural production of everyday spatial experience.