

Claudia Salamanca*

THE WORKOUT VIDEO: THE DESTRUCTION OF THE MIRROR

Abstract

This article is the analysis of the workout video genre. The historical approach taken here is in the form of genealogy, looking for the implications of this genre as a visual and social document.

Keywords: Femininity, Gender, Visuality, Fitness, Body, Beauty, Identity.

Resumen

El presente artículo es un análisis del género de video conocido como Video de aeróbicos. Este artículo realiza una aproximación genealógica al video analizando sus diferentes implicaciones como documento visual y social.

Palabras Clave: Femenino, género, visualidad, ejercicio, cuerpo, belleza, identidad.

Introduction

I remember a story from a couple of years ago. It was 7:30 am in the morning, there was a woman coming out of the shower. She was looking at her clothes, deciding what to wear, thinking about all her activities for the day. At the same time she was being explored by the familiar gaze of her partner who was lying in bed, watching the morning news. Suddenly he said, "Claudia, you know what? I think you need to workout." One week later, I started to workout, and I have to emphasize that workout is used here not as a sport,

* **Claudia Salamanca**, Professor, Departamento de Artes Visuales, Facultad de Artes, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá, D.C., Colombia.

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like swimming or jogging, it is a discipline of building. I am not going to explore all the dimensions of my feelings at that moment, all the gazes with which I explore my own body neither my (our) own crisis. To make it shorter, compulsively I started to collect workout videos. After two months I stopped working out. Suddenly my art turned into an exploration of my own female body. This paper should not be considered as a biased view of the workout nor as a reaffirmation of the male dominance upon the female body. Here I explore, through my own experience as an artist and as a woman, a visual genre that makes me think of the female body as a construction, a female and male construction. It is by my artistic visual analysis, both artistic and physical exploration of my own body, juxtaposed with discourses of identity and power in which I frame the discussion.

This paper considers workout videos as a representational form of power-knowledge around bodies. Workout is a political technology of "mastery and awareness of one's own body."¹ This materiality allows me to construct a genealogy of this genre, inscribed in the past three decades. For this purpose I am using tapes from 1979, when the first workout video was released, to the present, in order to illustrate more recent examples of this genre where the addressed spectator is a woman. The attempt here is to exert a transversal view that can cross the different discourses that interweave the visual development of this genre. A transversal view that can cross film studies, spectatorship, and performance.

The workout genre carries a paradoxical movement between spectatorship and practice. Indeed you do not buy a workout tape to watch it while lying on the couch. It is a visual genre that expresses itself directly a practice in front of the TV Set. It talks to YOU, "now, come on, you can do it," it hails "Hey you there" using Althusser's figure. Like Jane Fonda in her workout video *Low Impact Aerobic* says: "Can you talk? Can you carry on a conversation? [Asking the viewer/performer]. Hi Jane! I am having a wonderful time, I stopped smoking, and I am meeting Craig! [She offers an example of conversation between the viewer/performer and herself]. As long as you can talk you are in a good aerobics state."

Foucault's ideas of how power relations materially penetrate the body along with the idea of power as "no longer in the form of control by repression but that of control of stimulation"² with a

"the body is always simultaneously inscribed in both the economy of pleasure and desire and the economy of the discourse, domination and power"³ have a radical importance here to underpin the transversal discourses inscribed in this visual genre. The notion of power that I am considering in this analysis is power as positive, in a productive network in which the articulation of representation plays an important role in the sphere of power: "not who we are, or where we came from, so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on *how we might represent ourselves* [my emphasis, not in the original]."⁴

Power here does not mean repression or oppression. Power and its political technologies around bodies shape representations of health, fitness, discipline, and pleasant bodies without any unidirectional power structure. I will articulate political technologies and the data of the discourses around representational bodies in the workout videos.

I have chosen to study workout videos due to their apparent *insignificance* inside the feminist discursive scope, contrary, for example to the significance of pornography. Later on, I will argue that these two genres touch on each other. Their *insignificance* could be given by assuming two positions. First, the right to exercise and build the female body as a space already conquered. The second, which is the total opposite position of the first, is that the workout video is another space in which male dominance is exercised, producing female anxiety for beauty and fitness. Both discourses seem obvious, however when discussing the topic of workout videos with other women the obviousness of these two positions is not transparent. My interest "to make visible the unseen can also mean a change of level, addressing oneself to a layer of material which had hitherto had no pertinence for history and which had not been recognized as having any moral, aesthetic, political or historical value."⁵

Workout as a discipline fits into the women's right to exercise their physical bodies, as a conquered space inside the feminist discursive scope. Mary Wollstonecraft⁶ who first argued, in her early Feminism, that one of the factors of female dependence to male dominance is situated in the weak body of women along with education. Her proposal to improve female education and welfare was echoed at

the same time by people like Erasmus Darwin, Catherine Macaulay Graham, and Hannah More. All of them expressed their concern for women's health and advocated physical exercise. Wollstonecraft criticized the cultural roles that were assigned to women in the frame of modesty, decorous and fashionable behaviours. She saw that physical exercise would not compromise femininity and gentility. Wollstonecraft's statements were an attempt to denaturalize the women's role in society in order to achieve women's rights. Evidently in the same line of claims women's health and fitness has contributed to discourses of racism and eugenics, like for example Nazism (see Wolf's analysis of National Socialist Germany⁷), and inside Victorian Medical policies in the hands of people like Herbert Spencer and Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell.⁸

The third reason to write about workout videos lies in the dialogue that I have had with women about this genre. For my artistic purposes I started collecting workout videos. When I asked my female acquaintances if they could donate me their workout videos, their first reaction was, in general, "What makes you think that I have such tapes?" And later, after I explained my "artistic" research they continued, "Well, in my house [neighbourhood, family, work] I can find some tapes for you because a friend [sister, aunt, mother, acquaintance, neighbour] used to workout." Constantly I have found a reference to others exercising but rarely a self-conscious subject that sometimes, frequently or rarely works out or used to workout, and when finally someone admits owning such tapes the reference is in the past. I want to point out that this practice is radically different than the gym. These two practices manifest differences in socialization, appreciation, and visualization of the female body. My paper is concerned with workout videos, a visual document which exists in a practice that is primarily private, at home, in front of a TV Set.

The Destruction of the Mirror

A couple of months ago, when I began asking myself about the reception theory behind the workout video genre, it seemed that the Lacanian image of the mirror was fitting perfectly for this genre, but at the same time was not completely satisfactory. I was not

satisfied; my conversations with other women about this genre were definitely more complex than the formation of the ego, the narcissus illusion. If the mirror image is so perfect, what makes us want to break it? This image of breaking the mirror came to me after watching "Conan, The Barbarian" (1982). Arnold Schwarzenegger (Mr. Universe), performs the principal role in this movie. In one of the crucial scenes Conan goes to an ice palace to save the princess. To undertake his task he has to fight against a monster inside a mirror room. A wizard who is hidden behind one of the mirror walls created this monster. The monster starts winning the fight until by accident Conan breaks a mirror and realizes that the monster becomes weak, after this he decides to break all the mirrors. This fight ends with Conan sending a dagger to the last wall killing the wizard and destroying the monster or its reflection. What is the monster in the workout genre?

Theories of spectatorship drawn from psychoanalysis show an approach where the subject/spectator vanishes into the screen/mirror. The mirror phase, using Lacan's definition, entails the disappearance of the subject, eradicating the distinction between the spectator and the viewer. The child and his/her image in the mirror represent that fragmented moment of separation and alienation from the body of the mother, but it is also a self-recognition, where the child tries to make up everything that is lack, constructing his/her ideal ego. However, if that identification is applicable in the case of workout videos, the process of desire and pleasure identified by Lacan after and during a child's mirror phase seems with a transparency that avoids the question of the female construction of subjectivity and her consciousness. The psychoanalytic theory in film is detached from the female agency where the workout video reaches meaning into the materiality of the body. Indeed the practice that workout videos proposed to the viewer/practitioner oscillates between a relation of love/hate, misrecognition/recognition, homo/hetero gaze, and other/self.

The disturbance in the relationship between the workout video and the practitioner is precisely the distance that exists between the image in the mirror (TV Set) and the performer, not the illusion and narcissist unity that the psychoanalysis' account offers. It is the distance that takes place during the practice.

The practice that carries the workout is fulfilled by the agency of the subject, in which exists an agreement, a mutual accord between the visuals, and the practitioner. The accord emphasizes imitation, pace by pace, one's subjection. However, the practice disrupts such transparency. The interaction with the image is materialized inside the body; it carries pleasure, satisfaction, pain, sweat, frustration, and awareness.

The narcissus illusion, the obsession with himself and his pure beauty are not applicable in this practice. First of all, when the regimen of exercise starts, a goal is implicit. The goal is visible and it is portrayed in the image of the motivator or trainer guiding the workout video. The motivator embodies the lack of the practitioner. When a woman buys a workout video, she is expressing a necessity. Real or not, the necessity exists. In general, the workout video as a genre, expresses that necessity in a speech of desire as its first feature:

Tae-box: "Give yourself a hand, you might not have twenty minutes, you might no have an hour, but you can get out eight minutes of your life that can help to change yourself, your health is important, if you believe that, that is what keeps you going."

This necessity is what makes this genre possible. It moves between body and mind, reinforces self-esteem, reduces fatigue, creates discipline and healthy bodies, with specific targets, hips, abdominals, legs, thighs, routines to reshape the body after birth or during pregnancy. The motivator should embody all that the practitioner lacks. Sometimes the motivator is not an expert in fitness;⁹ he/she could be a model, an actor/actress, or a public figure. However, he/she always possesses what the practitioner does not have. The motivator could be male or female, but usually it is a woman. A trainer could give the expertise knowledge necessary for credibility if the motivator does not have that background, but in the video the trainer is not performing the role of the motivator. The trainer could be performing in the crew or in a second role guiding the motivator.

The practitioner is the echo of the motivator. The metaphor of Echo instead of Narcissus fills more the image of this practice. The practice takes place in the private space of the practitioner in

front of a TV Set. The interaction between the parts is mediated in a technological way. Sometimes the motivator requires the practitioner to rewind or fast-forward the tape, depending on the self-evaluation of the practitioner. The TV Set is a reference point to the movements, "Move to the right of your TV Set," "Push your head to your knees, do not look at the TV Set,"¹⁰ are examples of this contact zone. The motivator acknowledges the environment in which the practitioner is performing. Fonda makes reference to the carpet, Cindy Crawford at the beginning of the tape explains the simplicity of her routine based on the basic and familiar (house) elements that the practitioner would need, a chair, a carpet, a bottle of water, and a towel. In the practice of the workout video exists a dislocation that is acknowledged by the motivator and that construct an imperfect copy of the tape. As Mark Z. Danielewski writes in his fictional novel *House of Leaves*¹¹ about Echo:

Generally speaking, echo has two coextensive histories: the mythological one and the scientific one. Each provides slightly different perspective on the inherent meaning of recurrence, especially when that repetition is imperfect.

To illustrate the multiple resonances found in an echo, the Greeks conjured up the story of a beautiful mountain nymph. Her name was Echo and she made the mistake of helping Zeus succeed in one of his sexual conquest. Hera found out and punished Echo, making it impossible for her to say anything except the last two words spoken to her. Soon after, Echo fell in love with Narcissus whose obsession with himself caused her to pine away until only her voice remained. Another lesser known version of this myth has Pan falling in love with Echo. Echo, however, rejects his amorous offers and Pan, being the god of civility and restraint, tears her to pieces, burying all of her except her voice... In both cases, unfulfilled love results in the total negation of Echo's body and the near negation of her voice.

The repetition as an echo is imperfect. Just as an exercise my reader should try to follow for a couple of weeks some workout video. By experience I can tell that it is necessary to be skilful or in the other hand, be absolutely perseverant, patient and disciplined,

three of the goals that workout videos try to forge in the viewer/practitioner. The motivator is always aware of this dislocation/imperfection and tries to explain this phenomenon in different ways. For example, Fonda attributes imperfection as a gender factor, a male factor. One of her videos shows a clumsy guy who gets into the class by accident. During one hour this young guy fights to get the pace, the rhythm, to match the changes of movements, and when he finally does he expresses his satisfaction showing emotional responses that are not socially acceptable in the fitness room. In this example, the imperfection is not acceptable. The one who does not get it, must be a male who obviously does not understand the importance of being aware of the body. Another example is Elle MacPherson with her video *The Body Workout*. She presents her video emphasizing that not all the bodies are the same, that the body of her trainer Karen Voight is different than hers, as well as the viewer's one. However, the exercise routine works for her because she is lucky to have good genes. So if it does not work in me, it is because there exists a biological degenerative or bad gene in me? In this case imperfection is a biological factor. The last example of imperfection is *Kathy Smith's Ultimate Stomach and Thighs Workout*. This video explains that the imperfection of the workout routines is precisely the emphasis in repetition and not in "mastery and awareness of one's own body."¹² She emphasizes movements where the exercise is mediated by the control and awareness of specific zones and muscles. During the first part of the video she does not workout she just keeps correcting positions of her crew, pointing with her finger certain muscles, and grasping flesh to be sure that the practitioner is contracting the zone. This workout is charged with the medical gaze. Constantly she dissects the movement, fragmenting it. Each movement is decomposing in muscles interacting with each other.

Romanyshyn¹³ presents a notion of a mirror where the reflection is a representation of oneself as it appears to others. The mirror under this perspective is important in its action of reflection, where the image is detached from the viewer as that illusionary space and is concentrated in a daily account of performance and identification. It is as Hall stresses, "How we [I] might represent ourselves [myself]" to others? It is in this daily performance where the workout video as a practice breaks the mirror. During the

practice exists an agency to construct an image from the reflection and in relation with what is outside. As Hall points out "it requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process."¹⁴

In the video *The Method, Pilates. Target Specifics: Abs/Arms/Hips/Thighs* (1999), Jennifer Kries incorporates the mirror. She proposes a dialog between the TV Set–Workout video with the practitioner and the practitioner with the mirror at home, something that could look like this (Fig. 1.):

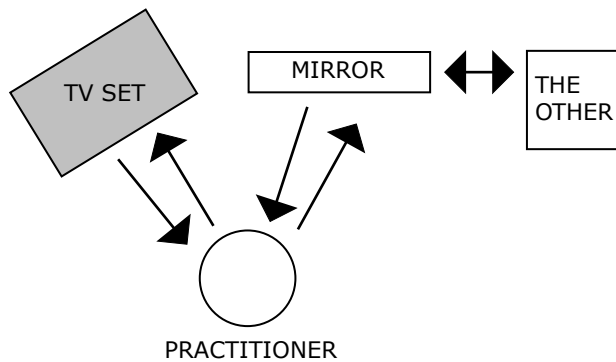


Fig. 1. TV Set, Practitioner, Mirror, and The Other.

Her video is one of the toughest I have seen. As Kathy Smith's video is focus on control and awareness, Kries' increments the body's recognition suggesting the interaction with the mirror to, as she says, empowering the figure. She is conscious of the level of difficulty, so she always keeps encouraging the practitioner by imaging the change of her body after following this routine. Then the mirror occupies a double movement, first to recognize their own body, as it is "imperfect," and also as a field for imagination and construction. For Romanyshyn the reflection in the mirror has weight, it counts. It counts not for self dissolution as Narcissus in the lake, it counts in the way that presents to oneself the image as is seen by others, is in this process of representation where identification can take place.

The Female and Male Gaze

Studies around spectatorship have tried to give closer accounts to subjectivity where factors of gender, race, age, and class matters at the moment of viewer experience. As an example of these accounts Manthia Diawara approaches the notion of race in regard to Blacks represented in Hollywood. She suggests, "that the components of 'difference' among elements of race, gender and sexuality give rise to different readings of the same material."¹⁵ Her argument presents the idea of a resistant spectator. She introduces a concept that is really important to this account, which is the notion of difference. This element is a conscious elaborate process in which the spectator places himself/herself in respect to others, and found him/her in a different position from the reflection. This difference is not based in physical aspects. Diawara presents her "resistance spectator" not necessarily as black. She includes White spectators as well. The concept of the difference that evidently starts from gender, race, age, and class does not imply a vision based on dichotomies like male/female and/or Black/White; the difference could exist inside, for example, the womanhood.

Ann Stoler in her paper *Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in Twentieth-Century Colonial Cultures*¹⁶ brings an example of how women in the Colonies exercised segregationist standards against native women. She shows how in this colonial experience women cannot be taken as a homogeneous group. In her argument diverse discourses intersect; notions of gender, class, sexuality, health, and eugenics challenge this evenness within women.

Laura Mulvey on *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*¹⁷ privileges the male gaze as the position that the viewers exert at the moment to confront representations of women in Hollywood films. Mulvey argues in regard to women representation that "cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking, but it also goes further, developing scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect."¹⁸ She presents a spectator frozen by the fetishisation of the female image, confronting passively this male gaze regardless of gender. Evidently, women representation in visual documents has developed through the phallogocentrism, however, it is time to recognize the transversal discourses of difference, and woman subjectivity that overlap the male gaze and its dominance.

Mulvey presents that scopophilia acts within cinema (the pleasure of looking) "in using another person [in this case women] as an object of sexual stimulation through sight... and developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego comes through identification with the image seen."¹⁹ At this point she makes no difference between male or female gaze. Her spectator again is a powerless subject, no matter if it is male or female. The spectator in her account is a generic category that reproduces linear identification. Women, as a subject also of that identification, identify with that male construction in order to perpetuate patriarchal hierarchies. Inside this movement we can infer that women reproduce a female gaze upon other women, not as a particular female gaze but more as a female gaze formed through male dominance.

In the late nineties there was a commercial in Colombia that exploited the idea of female gaze upon females. It was a commercial advertising panty-hoes with a special feature that lift the hips. In the commercial, there was a happy couple having lunch in a restaurant. Suddenly a beautiful woman enters into the room, the guy responds with a shy look as a sign of respect to his partner, but to the contrary the woman follows the other woman with her gaze, analyzing every part of the other's body. Finally, the commercial closes with a slogan like this: "To wake a male gaze is easy, but to wake the other [female gaze] is difficult, use X panty-hoes." This commercial uses female gaze as an example of a woman's subjectivity, which is moved not by a critical eye but mostly by envy of other women. There was another shampoo commercial moving in the same dynamic of female gaze over females, whose slogan was "Envy, is better to wake it than to feel it." These examples are materializing an approach of the female gaze in a unilateral way.

Laura Mulvey's unilateral approach frames the agency and preoccupation of women for her representation just to be at the service of male dominance, as an over-determination. Mulvey seems to be preoccupied by some sort of contamination of women's essential identity. She evidently points out an important fact: Hollywood films are mostly made by men, but at the same time she is using the same argument to develop a theory of spectatorship that ignores women's experience with self-representation and puts aside any discussion of women's agency. She works under the Cartesian

world: body and mind. Her account equals body as a passive female realm and male as mind with the power and agency to measure and observe the world.

Romanyshyn shows this Cartesian consciousness (body/mind) as the construction of the window, where the entire world became a spectacle for observation, measurement, and calculation. The spectator's body became also a specimen; even *his* own body's sensuous relation with the world became an obstacle of this anatomical gaze. Body and mind became another dichotomy in which we engage our gaze. The Cartesian consciousness mediated our visibility around the world as Romanyshyn says:

The spectator mind behind the window which keeps an eye upon the world, which takes the world's measure from a safe distance, is a masculine form of consciousness characterized by power over nature as its chief value. And the nature which is dominated is associated with the wild, unruly feminine which needs to be tamed. All of this figures are the shadows which haunt the spectator mind which has taken leave its senses.²⁰

Evidently, those dichotomies have marked our construction of knowledge. Any approach that we want to undertake is placed under our logocentrism. As Bhabha says using Derrida, "once to say that 'translation' between languages and cultural systems is always a *regulated* transformation: and a second time to say, not surprisingly, 'that everyday language is not innocent or neutral. It is the language of Western metaphysics and it carries with it not only a considerable number of presuppositions of all types, but presuppositions inseparable from metaphysics.'"²¹

Linda Williams in her analysis about pornography *Speaking Sex* notes that "for women, one constant of the history of sexuality has been a failure to image their pleasures outside a dominant male economy. This is to suggest that the disciplinary practices Foucault describes so well have operated more powerfully on the bodies of women than on those of men."²²

At this regard, workout videos present a challenge in its analysis, which is the gaze that is privileged in these documents? Which are the assumptions at the moment to exert our gaze upon the other?

During the eighties, a sub genre derived from workout videos was developed. As the workout video genre was developed by the circulation of tapes, its presence in rental video stores was obvious. However, it does not make any sense if we think around the daily practice. If a woman decides to workout, the practice of the routine could last months, then what was the sense to have a tape in a rental video store, whose rental periods oscillate from two days to one week? Informal surveys pointed out that workout videos were bought by women but rented by men. As a result, a new workout sub-genre appeared: *The Erotic Workout Video*, exercise videos as entertainment, with the slogan "Exercise your eyes." Videos that started as a common exercise routine and progressively turning into adult content.

A feminist anti-pornography account of this resignification of the workout video genre into pornography could lie on the reaffirmation of the male gaze and violence exercised upon female body, and how the workout video is a female practice at male service, servicing their appetites, fantasies and notions of beauty for desire. However I would like to open the discussion bringing the concept of "foreclosure" in a productive and positive notion of power with Butler's words: "I propose that we actively misappropriate the term for other purposes, transpose its proper meaning into an improper one, for the task of rethinking the way in which censorship acts as a "productive form of power.""²³ What are the discursive regimes produced behind the women's denied of working out? And how the irruption of pornography in this genre works for the female denied? But, what is denied?

The female and male gaze portrayed in this account mediated any representation of women as a mechanism of control, strategies of normalization within women's activities around representation. These mechanisms are not necessarily products of male politics, but also exist inside female accounts of their representative roles in society.

Female Identity[ies] and Workout Video as a Practice

The construction of self-perception in the workout video experience is point of intersection, where conjoin image/reflection, the female desire, the female representation, the strength of the body, and the female and male gaze.

As Hall emphasizes "identities[y] are thus the points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices constructs for us. They are the result of successful articulation or chaining of the subject into the flow of the discourse."²⁴

Workout videos carry into their materiality, the female body, which "is always simultaneously inscribed in both the economy of pleasure and desire and the economy of discourse, domination and power"²⁵ in which the articulation of representation (materialization) "is strongly grounded in a performative theory of language and the subject, but performativity is shorn of its association with volition, choice and intentionality and (against some of the misreadings of *Gender Trouble*) re-read 'not as the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names but rather as that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains.'"²⁶

It seems to me, that attached to the workout practice apparently exists a powerless female subject. The subject attached to the workout videos is so powerless that feminist consensus denies her existence. The ideal woman victimizes this subject. One of the things that strike me most is that in personal contact with women, the workout videos is a shameful thing in their lives but at the same time it manifests a contradiction in the market, and in other spheres of socialization. The production of these videos continues incessantly, thousands of videos are advertised by TV and mostly through Internet. The other contradiction occurs in the Internet sphere. By looking carefully through the Web I found hundreds of letters written by practitioners of workout videos, expressing their admiration and gratefulness to those motivators. These women's writings share their wonderful experiences practicing these videos, how they have lost weight under this X, or Y regime—n of exercise, how they are feeling better in mind and body.²⁷

Emily's Story

When I turned 40 I decided that I did not want to continue gaining 10 pounds every year. I began a strength training routine. Sure the benefits for a woman are increased muscle mass and hopefully, less chance of bone density loss. I began

my routine with better health in mind. I liked the changes but I could not shape my abs like I wanted. I found the *Firefighter's Workout*, with the 5-minute ab work out. The more I used it the tighter and more defined my abs became. I was very pleased with myself but not so much as when I started marching band camp in July.

I teach high school and image is everything to the teenagers. At band camp I wore the midriff-baring tops popular this summer. My color guard was so proud of me. They kept telling me that I looked great. Thanks to a few minutes three or four nights a week my energy level is high, I eat better because my body does not crave fats and sweets, and I feel more self-confident. I went from a size 14 to a size 6 in 12 months. I realized just how much I had changed after beginning school when teachers would stop me in the hall and ask how I had shaped up. I was happy to share my "secret" with them. Persistence, patience, and a great program! Thanks for all your help.

Emily Neely

*Smyrna, Tennessee*²⁸

It seems to me that the problem arises in the concept of beauty that women as well men play with. Beauty as a category appears to be natural, or better, should be natural. Inside female regimes of visibility, beauty appears untouchable, pure, natural, and virginal. It appears to be a passive quality and not a construction, neither a product of discourses and the socialization of its practices. Beauty as a practice, as a performance is loaded with the agency of the subject and in this case, with the agency in the daily life of women.²⁹ When beauty is assumed as a practice it is focused on the question for whom, anticipating an answer that is men, ratifying structures of male dominance. The account of beauty for men carries the exclusion of beauty for self-satisfaction of beauty from woman to woman.

When women denied owning workout tapes, they are denying the artificial beauty. The powerless subject that is supposedly performed by the viewer/practitioner is such that has to construct their beauty. Even people who have never practiced workout video carry this stereotype notion. Beauty denies practice inside

the Cartesian consciousness. The concept of beauty that Laura Mulvey is looking inside cinema is not such that can be fetishized or constructed through gaze, camera angles, fragmented close-ups object of voyeurism and later sadism, abnormal behaviours. It seems to me that the arguments that she pulls through her essay keep screaming for the normal. It seems that in this approach exists also a denied of the body, a claim for the real place for women. I think that a phenomenologist approach of the mirror is necessary as the articulation of representation as a performance for self-identification that evidently spreads its branches into a social construction in which male and female gazes look at each other.

As long as beauty/practice is maintained as performance for men, the powerless women would continue. This is primarily because this account extirpates from women the agency to create their own beauty (representation).

Three Decades of Workout Videos

For the construction of a small genealogy of the workout videos I am going to explore some examples of this genre. For this purpose I am going to use Fonda's video *Low Impact Aerobic* (1986), Kathy Smith's *Ultimate Stomach and Thighs Workout* (1989), Crawford with *The Next Challenge* (1993), MacPherson with her video *The Body Workout* (1997), Kries's workout *The Method Pilates, Target Specifics: Abs/Arms/Hips/Thighs* (1999), and *Tae Bo: Knockout* workout with his creator Billy Blanks (2000).

This genealogy is a history of how Aerobics were introduced in homes by the creation of the videotape. It is not a history of Aerobics, which can be traced from 1968 with the publication of Dr. Kenneth H. Cooper's book *Aerobics*: "Dr. Cooper, a U.S. Air Force major with a doctorate in exercise physiology, was assigned to develop a special drill for a group of Air Force recruits desperately in need of improvement. They were, in his words, overweight, over-anxious, chain-smoking slobs... the result, euphoria indeed."³⁰

The history of workout video was developed by the introduction of home reproduction image technology. It took two ways, the videotape, Beta or VHS, and the CED Magic Technology. The CED Magic Technology

was a vinyl disk, which can reproduce sound and image as well. It also had two sound channels that, for the purpose of workout, contained the music in one channel and the instruction of the motivator in the other. In this way, it developed interactivity, which was product of the practice. It consisted in that the practitioner was capable to perform the routine without the instructions of the motivator; equally it had the capability to be rewound and fast-forwarded to certain timing of the disk.

Evidently, as we know, the CED and Beta technology disappeared and the workout video genre evolved in the form of VHS tapes along with the VCR.

The first workout videotapes were concentrated on exercise by dancing, and are still the way the routines work in general. As Gin Miller³¹ said in an interview for CBS Health News:³² "Every women knew how to dance because, growing up in the 1950's and 60's, everybody danced." This explanation is linked to the traditional education of women, in which to know how to dance was a symbol of education, and sociability.³³

After Mr. Cooper publication the euphoria was everywhere. Mr. Cooper's wife, Milli, decided to write a book addressing women: *Aerobics for Women* (1972). These books started to develop communal practices between women, in public spaces, churches basements, and small rooms for sharing this new practice.

Fonda is considered the guru of the workout videos. Not because her contribution or innovations to the routines, it is because she was the one who popularized the genre in the VHS format, bringing "fitness to the masses."³⁴ *Jane Fonda's Workout* (1982) video is the most widely sold workout video in history.

Fonda's *Low Impact Aerobic* (1986) is the result of increased number of injuries that the previous workout produced. In the early days of workout videos, there were a lot of jumps that were hard for the joints, specially the knees. It was not until 1985 that low impact aerobics came as an option. Fonda's *Low Impact* shows in its cover a lot of medical language, emphasizing a knowledge that the public was requiring. The way that the video is described on the back of the VHS cover looks like a doctor's recipe: "the doses, '3 days per week', the weights, 'begin with 1/2 lbs. per wrist and work up no more than

1 lb. I do not recommend the use of hand held weights because of: 1. The undue stress placed on the forearm flexors and extensor, and 2. The isometric contraction required to hold hand-held weights which may increase blood pressure unnecessarily..." And it was "conceived in consultation with Dr. James Garrick, Director of Dance and Sports Medicine Center at St. Francis Hospital in San Francisco."

Parallel to the medical language of the cover, the tape is full of daily home language at the moment of describing exercises. Jane Fonda says: "Sweep the carpet, girls," this sentence is to describe a movement where one foot slides towards the other. Also she uses expressions like "push the umbrella up," "the sun rises again," "Hawaiian arms," and "chicken flap." The music that she uses in this video moves between country, dance, folk, and disco, and the change between each other is marked by the march, march exercise and march music. The location of this video was her traditional fitness space, five windows, and no furniture. In general the workout videos from the eighties are placed inside close spaces, which looks like fitness rooms or empty rooms, some of them have carpets and plants. They give the impression that some furniture was there a minute before the camera started shooting. As a feature of this genre, the motivators are never alone; they always have a crew of followers expressing their enthusiasm by clapping, screaming, jumping and laughing. In this video, Jane Fonda was accompanied by her crew of mostly women. There are two men in the back, one is engaged in the aerobics exercise, and the other works as a male example of clumsiness.

At the end of the eighties the videos started not only to be more specific, targeting specific zones of the body, motivated by fashion and the eye of the camera. MTV, TV shows as *FAME*, *Solid Gold Dancers*, movies like *Flash Dance* (1983) and *Perfect* (1985) touched the fitness world.

Kathy Smith's Ultimate Stomach and Thighs Workout video was released in 1989. This video is part of her larger series of workout videos³⁵ that she released during the eighties. Her video was completely revolutionary, she introduced the idea of control and awareness of the body, as a response of the effectiveness that the market was claiming, there were not enough jumps, repetitions and dancing. It was required anatomy and medical knowledge, accompanied with method.

She moves beyond warm up, workout and stretching, she introduces phases of discipline regulated by visual results in the practitioner's body. She introduces questionnaires inside the tapes as a way of self-evaluation. After every phase the practitioners have to stop and answer the questions related to tension, stress in some muscles, breathing and physical achievements. If the practitioner does not answer positively to all the questions it was a signal to stop, rewind the tape and keep one week more in that segment of the tape.

Smith is the first motivator who developed the idea of gaze, as a way of control, she says: "Keep looking at your abs, control them." She dissects every movement, describing the muscles that interact in every exercise. After the control was achieved the repetition and fast pace were allowed. Her crew works with her presenting their bodies to her analysis and gaze. Again, like the workout videos of the eighties it takes place in close-carpeted spaces, but she introduces a touch of high technology, a video wall in the back, which is displaying the shoots of other camera focusing on body details of the crew. Also it works as the introduction to the next phase, showing titles, describing the next zone to work.

Crawford's video *The Next Challenge* (1993) is one of the most refined workout videos at the level of production. The graphics, animations, quality of camera shots are absolutely planned, it is indeed the first video which plays with the camera, and creates more than one narrative at the same time. This video takes place in a warehouse, a rough environment but at the same time with paintings behind, trying to give the impression that in the same location conjoins talent, roughness, body, and mind.

She is a model, a public figure, she is not the expert in fitness but she is the proof that workout works. The video is developed by her but in some shots or sometimes in voice of the trainer appears and his voice mixes with her enthusiasm. Workout videos of public figures, where the motivator is not an expert but the motivator is the lively proof of the results of working out, are not developed with a crew. Instead of that, they are self-experience opened to the public, satisfying some curiosity that asks if the public figure looks natural or not. There is an anxiety to value beauty by its naturalness, without surgery, prosthesis, or implants, along with discipline and endurance in the body. She does not need a crew, she does not need to be cheered up, she is resolute and disciplined, with goals that are taken and reached.

This video as I said before takes place in this warehouse but its spatiality is dislocated by changing the location to a desert landscape, where Crawford continues with the same movement, at the same pace, but her hair is free, moving by the wind, the sun is shining, the camera angles change from the eye level to a lower position. In the eye level angle we are familiar to the subject, he/she presents to us on a familiar level, giving the illusion of equality in rank, class position and knowledge. In the low angle the camera looks up to the subject, making it seem important, powerful and perhaps larger than the viewer. The changes of angle, outfit, and styling in Crawford's video give the impression of looking at an Amazon woman. At that moment the trainer disappears, she is alone and the viewer/practitioner becomes her crew.

Crawford's workout video presents at the end of the routine an appendix with the description of the movements, in a fragmenting way. Her video uses the resource developed by Edward Muybridge in the nineteenth century. He developed serial images of fast motion contributing to resolve the mystery of how motion can be understood. It is a way of fragmenting time and space. This resource is a way of knowledge of the body and its motion, emphasizing every second of the movement as another way to awareness of the body.

MacPherson in her workout video *The Body Workout* (1997) performs with her trainer Karen Voight in various outside locations. This video moves to beaches, jungles, mountains, and rivers. Their intervention over the natural landscapes is minimal. They always appear working out over some flat surface that seems natural or does not modify the natural space. This video represents a series of workout tapes that in the middle nineties move outside the closed space in a gesture of conquering nature. In this way Crawford's video anticipates this movement. To the contrary of Crawford's video MacPherson occupies a passive role, it is her trainer who always speaks, and MacPherson reaffirms with some comments.

MacPherson presents the video and her experience losing 20 pounds in a private space, not at the gym. She shows her body as a proof that the workout works. Her comments are totally oriented toward discipline, effort and perseverance. She asserts that to workout is like to be in the army, but in a female army. At the end of the video, she and her trainer enjoy the natural landscape of the beach.

Kries's workout *The Method Pilates, Target Specifics: Abs/Arms/Hips/Thighs* (1999) is one of the tendencies of the nineties where body and mind have to workout at the same time. Some of these videos adopt yoga as the method to create this bridge like for example *Kathy Smith, New Yoga* (1994), *Jane Fonda-Yoga Exercise Workout* (2001) and thousands of other examples. Kries's video uses yoga but is not the core of her routine. Again her method is control and awareness of the body but it is the imagery, scenery, and music that call my attention. This video uses a scenery that evokes Japanese landscapes. There is a traditional type of bridge at the bottom of the set, the music is alive, there are two drummer bands placed at the sides of the rounded stage. The stage suggests the image of Ying/Yang symbol that is placed at the beginning of the video in the title. The crew is organized in a circle not parallel to the camera, as is the custom. It is not the imagery of one culture that is privileged; it is an amalgam of many in a new age way.

Tae Bo: Knockout workout video with his creator Blanks (2000). This video marks a tendency that the workout videos in general have had during its three-decade life. The videos have the tendency to become shorter to fill the requirements of a busy woman who does not have much time to work out. This video lasts eight minutes. Seven minutes of intense kick boxing and one minute of Tai Chi to relax at the end. This video also wants to keep the idea of working out body-mind at the same time. He is one of the few male motivators available in this genre and with great success. His status of male motivator and the type of exercise he does, has taken him to work out with the Marines. He is an example of how this genre has opened to men. Evidently this genre was a target for women due to the role of the motivator. The motivator is responsible for encouraging the crew and the viewer/practitioner but also of showing with his/her body the results of the workout routine. Billy Blanks appeals to female public because he focuses his routine on defence, and who more appropriate to show how to defend from males than a male. Kickboxing has always been an exercise whose goal is defence. Crawford's video is not focusing in kickboxing but when Cindy shows how to kick she says "And now you are going to learn how to defend yourselves." Blanks also appeals to female public by his own story which shows a powerless man turned into a powerful one. His Web site gives this description of his life: "Billy Blanks was born

the fourth of fifteen children to a hard working but poor African-American couple in Erie Pa, Isaac and Maybeline Blanks. Despite dyslexia, which impeded his learning, poverty, an anomaly in his hip joints which would impair his movement, a clumsiness which would earn him the taunts of his siblings and cause his coaches to think he would never amount to much. Billy went to become the dominant martial artist of the eighties, a world renowned star of martial Arts films and the top physical trainer in the country." It is a paradox that what in Fonda's *Low Impact Aerobics* was marked as imperfect: the clumsiness of the male is now what appeals to Blanks.

Conclusion

Through a more complex analysis of the workout visual genre I want to open the scope where many discourses interweave into this political technology of the body. Discourses of male dominance could not give a total account of the existence of this genre. This visual genre transcends the usual analysis in Film Studies by its translation into embodied practice, where is opened as a materiality of identity.

The feminist approach that analyzes this private home practice of the workout as a stage where male gaze exerts power over parameters of beauty and body does not present an account of woman's agency. This agency of women is displayed in the way women want to be perceived and represented; and these representational images are not Crawford's body or MacPherson's body. They are also more complex than the images that appear in the magazines.

Evidently, politics of health and discipline over the body have achieved more power over the female body than over the male body. However, this does not annul the existence of any creative network in which female bodies can be represented by their own agency. The workout practice can be one of those.

NOTES

¹ M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982) 55.

² Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*.

³ H. Bhabha, "Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism." *The Politics of Theory Colchester*. Ed. Francis Barker. (Colchester: University of Essex, 1983) 194.

⁴ S. Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?" *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Ed. Paul du Gay and Stuart Hall. (London: Sage Publications, 1996) 4.

⁵ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*.

⁶ M. Wollstonecraft, *The Vindication of the Rights of Women*. (New York: Penguin Classics, 1970).

⁷ E. Wolf, *Envisioning Power: Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 197–274.

⁸ Mc.Crone, K. "Play up! Play up! And Play the Game. Sport at the Late Victorian Girls' Public Schools." *From Fair Sex to Feminism: Sports and the Socialization of Women in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Eras*. Ed. J.A. Mangan and Roberta J. Park. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987).

⁹ Cindy Crawford in her workout video *The Next Challenge*: "I am not an expert, but many people ask me what I do to look like this, and basically here I'll tell you what I do. This method of exercise works for me, I can see the results that I want to see in my body. I feel like I want to feel, I have more energy, and I feel great!" (Translated from Spanish).

¹⁰ Kathy Smith in her video *Kathy Smith's Ultimate Stomach and Thighs*.

¹¹ Mark Z. Danielewski, *The House of Leaves*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 2000).

¹² Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 55.

¹³ R. Romanyshyn, *Psychological Life: From Science to Metaphor*. (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1993).

¹⁴ Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?" 3.

¹⁵ M. Diawara, *Black American Cinema*. (New York: Routledge, 1993) 212.

¹⁶ Stoler, A. "Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in Twentieth-Century Colonial Cultures." *Anthropology and Gender: The Feminist Critique* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

¹⁷ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16.3 (Autumn 1975) 6–18.

¹⁸ Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and narrative Cinema" 8.

¹⁹ Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and narrative Cinema" 9.

²⁰ Romanyshyn in an interview with Dolores Brien. In Brien, Dolores. *Interview with Robert Romanyshyn*. <<http://www.cgjungpage.org/psychtech/romanyshyn1.html>>.

²¹ J. Derrida, *Positions*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981) 196.

²² L. Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the Frenzy of the Visible*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) 1–33.

²³ J. Butler, *Excitable Speech: A politics of the Performative*. (New York, London: Routledge, 1997).

²⁴ Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?" 6.

²⁵ Bhabha, "Difference" 194.

²⁶ Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?" 15, citing Butler, *Excitable Speech* 2.

²⁷ <<http://www.firefightersworkout.com/testimonial.html>>, <<http://www.nirvanafitness.evisionhome.com/Testimonials.html>>, <<http://www.taebo.com/comments/tbgen.htm>>, <http://www.healthandfitnessmag.com/get-final_nov02dal_update.html>, <<http://www.bowflex.com/Testimonials/default.asp?intpage=21>>, <<http://fitnesskicks.com/testimonials.htm>>, and more.

²⁸ <<http://www.firefightersworkout.com/testimonial.html>>.

²⁹ For the purpose of this paper, beauty is concentrated in women, but it does not exclude "beauty" in men.

³⁰ J. Stern, "Jane & Michael Stern Encyclopedia of Pop Culture: An A to Z guide of who is who and what is what, from aerobics and bubble gum to Valley the Dolls and Moon Unit Zappa." (New York: Harper Perennial Zappa, 1992) 1-3.

³¹ Gin Miller was the founder of *The Step Aerobic Method*.

³² Article written by Ira Drayfuss. December 9, 2002. CBS Health News. <<http://www.cbsnews.com>>.

³³ Exercise by dancing also motivates that popular dancers performed as motivators in Workout videos, as the group *Solid Workout Dancers*.

³⁴ In 1999 *Ladies' Home Journal* included as one of their *100 Most Important Women of the 20th Century* Jane Seymour Fonda. Her recognition was not for her acting roles, or her antiwar activism, it was for "bringing the fitness to the masses."

³⁵ In 1989 it was also available: *Kathy Smith's Starting Out*, *Kathy Smith's Winning Workout*, *Kathy Smith's Fat Burning Workout*, and *Kathy Smith's Pregnancy Workout*.

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