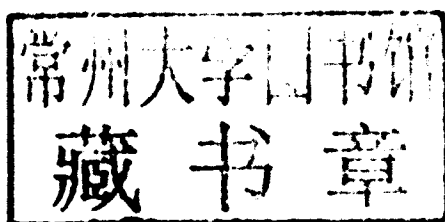


Critical Readings in Bodybuilding

**Edited by
Adam Locks and
Niall Richardson**

Critical Readings in Bodybuilding

Edited by
Adam Locks and
Niall Richardson



First published 2012
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Simultaneously published in the UK
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group,
an informa business*

© 2012 Taylor & Francis

The right of the editors to be identified as the authors of the editorial material, and of the authors for their individual chapters, has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Critical readings in bodybuilding / edited by Adam Locks and Niall Richardson.

p. cm. — (Routledge research in sport, culture and society; 9)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Bodybuilding—Social aspects. 2. Human body—Social aspects.

I. Locks, Adam. II. Richardson, Niall.

GV546.5.C75 2011

796.41—dc22

2011001224

ISBN13: 978-0-415-87852-4 (hbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-203-80945-7 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by Glyph International

Critical Readings in Bodybuilding

Routledge Research in Sport, Culture and Society

- 1. Sport, Masculinities and the Body**
Ian Wellard
- 2. India and the Olympics**
Boria Majumdar and Nalin Mehta
- 3. Social Capital and Sport Governance in Europe**
Edited by Margaret Groeneveld, Barrie Houlihan and Fabien Ohl
- 4. Theology, Ethics and Transcendence in Sports**
Edited by Jim Parry, Mark Nesti and Nick Watson
- 5. Women and Exercise**
The Body, Health and Consumerism
Edited by Eileen Kennedy and Pirkko Markula
- 6. Race, Ethnicity and Football**
Persisting Debates and Emergent Issues
Edited by Daniel Burdsey
- 7. The Organisation and Governance of Top Football Across Europe**
An Institutional Perspective
Edited by Hallgeir Gammelsæter and Benoît Senaux
- 8. Sport and Social Mobility**
Crossing Boundaries
Ramón Spaaij
- 9. Critical Readings in Bodybuilding**
Edited by Adam Locks and Niall Richardson

Acknowledgments

An earlier version of Chapter 3 was published as Monaghan, L.F. (2002) 'Vocabularies of Motive for Illicit Steroid Use among Bodybuilders', *Social Science & Medicine* 55: 695–708 (Elsevier).

Chapter 7: 'The Self Contained Body: the Heroic and Aesthetic/Erotic modes of representing the muscular body' is a slightly edited version of the chapter entitled 'The Self-Contained Body' in the work by Kenneth R. Dutton entitled *The Perfectible Body: The Western Ideal of Physical Development* (1995), published in the UK by Cassell, in the USA by Continuum and in Australia by Allen and Unwin.

Chapter 11 is an excerpt from 'Aphrodisia and Erotogenesis', in Joanna Frueh (2001) *Monster/Beauty: Building the Body of Love*. Copyright 2001 by the Regents of the University of California. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press: 59–88.

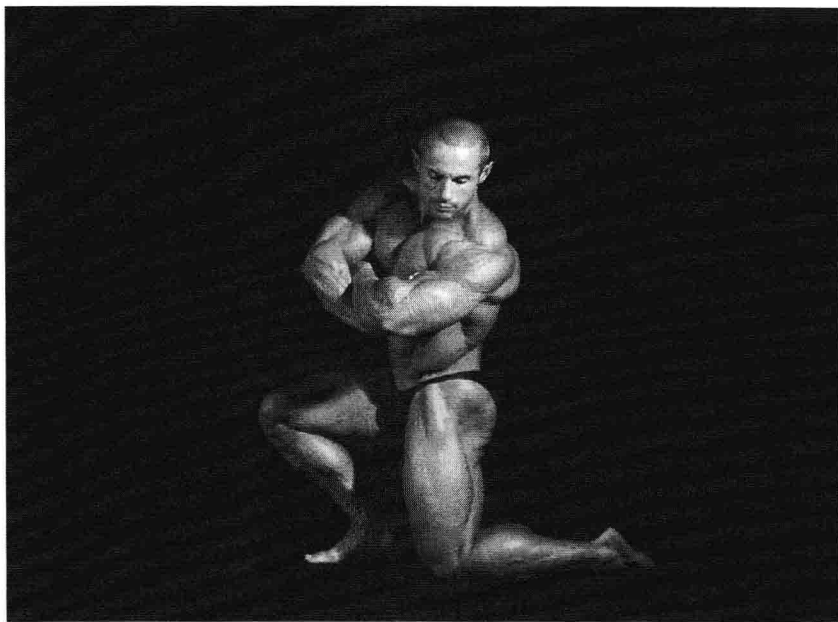


Figure 0.1 James Llewellyn. Courtesy of Rebecca Andrews.

Contents

List of Illustrations
Acknowledgments

vii
viii

Introduction

ADAM LOCKS

PART 1

Practices

19

Introduction to Part 1: What is the “Practice”
of Bodybuilding?

21

NIALL RICHARDSON

- 1 Buff Bodies and the Beast: Emphasized Femininity,
Labor, and Power Relations among Fitness, Figure,
and Women Bodybuilding Competitors 1985–2010

29

ANNE BOLIN

- 2 Outside and Inside the Gym: Exploring the Identity
of the Female Bodybuilder

58

TANYA BUNSELL AND CHRIS SHILLING

- 3 Accounting for Illicit Steroid Use: Bodybuilders’
Justifications

73

LEE F. MONAGHAN

- 4 Bodybuilding and Health Work: A Life Course Perspective

91

BRIAN BAILEY AND JAMES GILLET

5	The Shame–Pride–Shame of the Muscled Self in Bodybuilding: A Life History Study	107
	ANDREW C. SPARKES, JOANNE BATEY AND GARETH J. OWEN	
6	Building Otherwise: Bodybuilding as Immersive Practice	122
	LESLIE HEYWOOD	
	PART 2	
	Representations	141
	Introduction to Part 2: Bodybuilding as Representation	143
	NIALL RICHARDSON	
7	The Self Contained Body: The Heroic and Aesthetic/ Erotic Modes of Representing the Muscular Body	151
	KENNETH R. DUTTON	
8	Flayed Animals in an Abattoir: The Bodybuilder as Body-Garde	166
	ADAM LOCKS	
9	Strategies of Enfreakment: Representations of Contemporary Bodybuilding	181
	NIALL RICHARDSON	
10	Getting Hard: Female Bodybuilders and Muscle Worship	199
	NICHOLAS CHARE	
11	Aphrodisia and Erotogenesis	215
	JOANNA FRUEH	
	<i>Contributors</i>	231
	<i>Works Cited</i>	235
	<i>Index</i>	257

List of Illustrations

Figures

0.1 James Llewellyn	x
I.1 Noel Gordon	19
II.1 Rene L. Campbell	141
7.1 James Llewellyn	150
9.1 Markus Rühl	186
9.2 Markus Rühl	187
9.3 Nasser el Sonbaty	196
10.1 Catherine Boshuizen Flexing	200
10.2 Grandma48 Flexing	203
10.3 Crystal Rivers Flexing and Measuring	204

Tables

1.1 Comparison of Women's Bodybuilding Weight Classes 1984–2009	41
1.2 Convenience Sample: Total Number of Competitors June 2002–May 2004 in 59 Shows	50
1.3 Comparison: Women Bodybuilders, Fitness, Figure Competitors and Models	53

Introduction

Adam Locks

In recent years the body has become one of the most popular areas of study in the arts, humanities and social sciences. There are presently many undergraduate and postgraduate university modules in film, cultural studies, gender studies, visual culture, sociology, and sports science devoted to the study of the body in representation and cultural practice. As can only be expected, the activity of bodybuilding continues to be of interest to scholars of gender, media, film, cultural studies, and sociology. However, there is surprisingly little scholarship available on *contemporary* bodybuilding. For example, much of the existing cultural studies literature on bodybuilding addresses the performances of Arnold Schwarzenegger and the gender politics of the *Pumping Iron* documentaries and therefore addresses the practice of bodybuilding as it was in the 1970s. Yet as many of my students have remarked, Arnold's physique looks 'sylph like' in comparison to the bodies flexing on the current Mr. Olympia stage. Similarly, much of the existing writing on female bodybuilding simply praises the activity as feminist resistance: female bodybuilders are actively challenging traditional feminine iconography. Yet there is little attention paid to the eroticism of the built physique and the recently labeled form of sexual fetish known as 'muscle worship'. *Critical Readings in Bodybuilding* is intended, therefore, to be the first collection to address the contemporary practice of bodybuilding with specific attention to these issues, especially the way in which the activity has become increasingly more extreme and "freaky" and to consider much neglected debates of eroticism and sexuality related to the activity.

Second, the collection is intended to offer "critical" readings of the activity. Much of the writing on bodybuilding is often art historical, addressing the idea of the "perfectible" body as found in fine art and emulated by bodybuilders. This collection is not intended to provide a history of bodybuilding (although this introduction will offer a historical overview for the reader) but to critically investigate current debates in the contemporary activity. Similarly, there exist a number of ethnographic style studies in which the subcultural lifestyle politics of hardcore bodybuilders, including their nutritional and drug regimes, have

been investigated. This collection will not attempt to replicate this work but instead focus on current critical debates related to the activity. One of the strengths of the collection is that it unites a broad range of methodologies with some of the contributors drawing upon qualitative research, quantitative research, textual analysis and some empirical work inspired by personal experience.

Therefore, the collection will be divided into two parts. The first part, 'Practices,' addresses a range of bodybuilding topics related to the cultural activity itself. This part differs from a lot of previous work on bodybuilding as its analysis will not simply be limited to a consideration of the finished "product" – that is, the physique. Other topics which will be addressed in this part include: bodybuilding as "immersive" practice; how 'figure' competitions have eclipsed 'female bodybuilding competitions'; shame and pride; the gender politics of the gym itself and a consideration of drug use including recent developments in steroids and growth hormones. The second part, 'Representations,' is devoted to an analysis of bodybuilding representations and, as such, is more textually driven. As the introduction to this part will explain, the ever-increasing availability of media imagery, especially the internet (sites such as YouTube.com), has increased the number of representations of competitive bodybuilding physiques. It is important to remember that many people may never have seen a competitive physique (certainly not a professional bodybuilder's physique) in real life and so for many fans of the activity these bodies exist only in the hyperreal sense of media representation. Chapters in this part will therefore address such topics as the erotics of female muscle and 'muscle-worship'; competitive bodybuilders represented as "freaks"; and a discussion of the bodybuilding physique as avant-garde representation.

All the contributors to this collection are active researchers in the debates of bodybuilding. Many are widely published in this area and some contributors (Anne Bolin, Kenneth Dutton, Joanna Frueh, Leslie Heywood and Lee Monaghan) are authors of highly respected books and articles on bodybuilding. They have all agreed to contribute to this collection as they feel there is a need to address recent developments and, in some cases, revise or reconsider their original positions on this topic. Given that there have been so many developments in the activity of bodybuilding, we believe that a new collection, addressing contemporary representations and practices, is a necessary addition to the existing literature.

WHAT IS BODYBUILDING?

One of a number of "most muscular" poses, the crab brings everything to the surface, making the crabber look like a human anatomy

chart. I'd start with a deep breath, then, bending forward at the waist, fiercely thrust my arms before me like a crab's pincers and watch. The inevitable result was veins shooting like lightning across the skin of my chest and shoulders, muscle fibers dancing just beneath my skin, my whole body shuddering. Bodybuilders call this veiny look "vascularity", and it is prized as proof that a bodybuilder can be huge without being fat.

(Sam Fussell 1991: 65)

To a casual observer, male and female bodybuilding might seem simple enough: the attempt through training, nutrition, and self-discipline to attain the heavily muscled body which the bodybuilder considers "ideal" or "perfect"; professionally this body is then exhibited in competition to be appreciated for itself, much as a spectator (or owner) might cherish the form of a thoroughbred horse, or the line of a classic car. However, as Sam Fussell's description reveals, this would be too static a perception: building up the body is about attaining the dynamic moment of "vascularity," itself the product of many months and many stages of training and nutrition. Therefore, to appreciate bodybuilding properly (most especially in the professional realm) first requires a recognition that it is concerned with both practice and a product. Through its practices of training and dieting, bodybuilding for men and women involves the labor-intensive process of attaining the imagined "perfect" muscular body, but the product, in effect the climax of a fundamentally aesthetic moment, is extremely fleeting. In fact, it can only be given lasting substance in the photographic image, which is why the visuality of the body and its representation in photographs of bodybuilders and magazines devoted to such have been essential to the subculture of bodybuilding, right from its very beginnings. However, as Fussell's valuation of this crucial moment reveals – in being 'huge without being fat' – there is an additional dimension to these endeavors, since the sought-after ideal body also involves the pursuit of a dynamic target. In bodybuilding more than anything else size matters, and so any perfection which is attained in the moment of the pose must be seen as doubly fleeting. This is because the history of bodybuilding has been one of continual increase – in the size, weight, muscle mass and body measurements which constitute the dynamic aesthetics of the ideal bodybuilder's physique.

In this introductory part I want to provide a brief history of bodybuilding for men and women, and explain how for the male, there was a movement from a bodybuilding aesthetic based upon an imagined classical archetype to a far more excessive representation. Although bodybuilding remains rooted in the classical style, the far larger and defined bodies represented in bodybuilding magazines, gyms and on the stage during competition have begun to overwhelm classical codes that, historically, have operated as an aesthetic blueprint. Irrespective of classical

lineage, bodybuilding is based upon the increasingly fragmented body with over-developed body parts often celebrated and displayed over the whole. This fragmentation of the body is what I term “Post Classic.”

ORIGINS OF BODYBUILDING

Without doubt, the most important factor in the emergence of bodybuilding was the popularity in late nineteenth-century America of the coiner of the term, Eugene Sandow. Sandow developed an act based on displays of strength and muscular poses and he met with some success on the stage in Europe, but it was through an American that Sandow found fame and fortune. In 1887 while in search of a new act for his father’s Trocadero Theatre in Chicago, the American promoter Florenz Ziegfeld went to a performance of the musical *Adonis* in London and saw Sandow posing on the stage in between acts, gaining applause and admiration from both men and women in the audience (Dutton 1995: 121). Ziegfeld was struck by the potential for exhibition in the United States and he went on to establish Sandow as one of the most well-known bodies in the world. Ziegfeld invested \$5,000 to put Sandow on a tour of American and European theatres; he was a sensation and his popularity was such that the tour netted \$30,000 in six weeks, with Sandow eventually receiving \$1,500 a week (Webster 1982: 33). Sandow signed a four-year contract with Ziegfeld and spent the few years constantly touring America and England.

While Sandow occasionally took part in typically vaudevillian displays – notably his “fight” with a lion in 1894 (Chapman 1994: 88) – his real importance lies not in being a weightlifter, but more significantly as someone whose physique was viewed as an object of interest in its own right. Emmanuel Cooper comments: ‘Sandow was not described as a strong man but as “the world’s most perfect man”, someone who could lift weights and demonstrate strength, but who was also aesthetically pleasing’ (1990: 92). This distinction – between the celebration of strength demonstrated by an activity such as weightlifting and the appreciation of its results in a body built by such an activity – would become crucial to bodybuilding’s definition of itself. Success brought forth a plethora of magazines, books, and fitness products from Sandow (and a slew of imitators), all aiming to make the practice of physical culture, its subject, the body, and its object, images of the body, into marketable commodities.

To accentuate his body, Sandow did not wear the usual leopard skins and white tights, but brief shorts or even just a faux fig leaf while on stage (Budd 1997: 42). If near naked display was central to Sandow’s popularity, so were the photographs that recorded his muscular poses off stage. In 1899 the French writer and traveler Paul Bourget commented on how during a visit to a group of American millionaires in Newport,

Rhode Island, he was astonished to find that most of the various houses he visited had photographs of the semi-nude Sandow prominently on display (Chapman 1997: 4). Photography allowed the dissemination and sale of Sandow's body outside the theatre, and it has been the primary medium for displaying bodybuilding ever since. This extended the very practices of popular consumption, which William Ewing suggests had invented the sports star in the mid-1860s when photography had become less expensive and its products more widespread (1996: 168). By the 1880s, particular interest was already being shown in photographs of male and female athletic bodies shown by *cartes de visite*, cabinet cards, and cigarette cards (ibid.: 168). Given the long exposure times and primitive flash devices of early photography, it was impossible to capture anyone in any bodily pose except by requiring them to sit or stand still for at least several seconds. Working within such static impositions, the poses adopted by Sandow (and soon his many imitators) included elements drawn from classical statuary which provided a set of recognizable codes for the representation of muscularity that remain highly influential for bodybuilding even today.

It's probably fair to say that bodybuilding would likely never have achieved the success it did if it had not been for photography – a body-builder might hold a pose for a few seconds, but the photograph held the pose forever. Thus to understand the aesthetic of bodybuilding it is necessary to examine not just the live body in the event, but the body as represented in the photographic image (see Part 2 'Representations,' this volume). Furthermore, it is important to consider what both the actual bodies and the images of bodies reveal in terms of the inscription of the effort in the gym which has made the body what it is. Popular photography at the turn of the century had already given significant attention to the body, most especially in regard to the female nude. Pornographic images became available almost from the first advent of the photography – the earliest dates from 1855 (Koetzle 1994: 47). However, more aesthetic images of naked or semi-naked women at this time often used classical settings and props to legitimize their subject matter. Nevertheless, as Isabel Tang observes, unlike painting where the artist's model was often idealized, photography showed *real* women, resulting in a body seen with all its imperfections. She writes:

The problem with photography was that it was too candid; it showed too much. And a surfeit of the real made it impossible to sustain the ideal. Instead of the painter's ability to idealize the human form, in a photograph the blemishes and the imperfections of the actual woman were on full view. Instead of alabaster skins, there were blemished ones; instead of idealized limbs, they were awkward, foreshortened ones . . . This was the shock of the real.

(1999: 105, 107)

But if the female form often seemed let down by photography, it proved an ideal medium for displaying images of the muscularity which bodybuilders devoted such efforts to making real. Cooper comments that: 'The camera was perfect for documenting the success and development of the individual bodybuilder' and that 'the photographic process could flatter particular muscle development and show body proportions at their best by the use of angled lighting and so on' – particularly true of black and white photography (1990: 92). However, photographs also validated bodybuilding because as a medium they were considered to show the "real." Alan Thomas writes: 'An awareness of the remarkable fullness of the power born into his [Victorian] hands is plainly evident in the exclamations of delight with which the early photographer noted in his diary his ability to record with the camera every line and crack of the brickwork of his neighbour's chimney' (1978: 11). Due to this realism, photographers of the body had to use ways to prove the "artistic" veracity of photographs. Photographs of the body used props and heroic poses based on Western high art to suggest that photography was a continuation of painting and sculpture. Unlike the tradition of Western art where the artist idealized the body via brushwork (or carving), the bodybuilders created an aesthetic ideal in the flesh; hence the precise suitability of the photographic medium in recording this realization. Once again, Sandow was the primary originator of the photographic pose as a means of displaying developed muscles. In a fashion akin to the female nude, he was often photographed copying a variety of classical Greek statuary in poses. Such photographs of Sandow and his contemporaries thus provided a set of recognizable codes for the representation of muscularity that would become highly influential for bodybuilding, particularly within an American context.

AMERICAN MUSCLE

An American named Bernarr Macfadden had been strongly influenced by Sandow's bodybuilding contest and it inspired him to organize the first American bodybuilding competition in 1903. In an advertisement for the event, Macfadden wrote: 'In nearly every country in these great United States there is held an annual fair in which prizes are offered for the best specimens of the various domestic animals – horses, cows and pigs. But never on a single occasion has a prize been offered for the best specimen of man or woman' (Adams 2009: 50). As Kenneth Dutton notes:

Macfadden, never a man to let pass an opportunity for self-promotion, was not long in organising a series of similar contests in America. Hiring Madison Square Gardens as the venue, he offered a

prize of \$1,000 (an immense sum at the time) for the winner of his title as the ‘Most Perfectly Developed Man in America’. The victor was a physical education graduate of Harvard University, Albert Treloar (1873–1960), a former assistant to Sandow, who was to capitalise on this newly-won title by the publication of *Trelaor’s Science of Muscular Development* (1904) and a series of theatrical bookings under the name, ‘Albert, the Perfect Man’. In 1906, he became Director of Physical Education at the Los Angeles Athletic Club; it was from this location that he was to introduce the practice of bodybuilding to Southern California, where it was later to establish its unofficial world headquarters.

(1995: 128)

(The contest would later produce the most famous advocator for building up the body: Charles Atlas.) It was shortly after the 1903 competition that Sandow first coined the term “bodybuilding” in a book of the same name. Sandow refers to bodybuilding as part of Physical Culture commenting: ‘Physical Culture means all-round development whereby the organisms of the body, are brought into a thoroughly healthy condition, so enabling one to realise to the full what real health is’ (1904: 2). In Sandow’s description, bodybuilding is concerned with health and, as a result of this, an improved appearance. (This link to bodybuilding and health is still important in contemporary culture as Bailey and Gillett analyze, Chapter 4, this volume.) But bodybuilding was also about displaying the body as an object for contemplation and enjoyment (in either the competition or photograph); and most importantly for Sandow (and later Macfadden), it was a lucrative marketing concept. Sandow and Macfadden epitomized the fitness entrepreneur, but it would be in the mid-1940s that the dominant cultural narratives of bodybuilding would shift almost exclusively to America, and to West Coast America at that.

Why did the possession of a muscular body appeal so much to twentieth-century America? (See Heywood, Chapter 6, this volume, for further consideration of these debates.) To understand this it is instructive to briefly examine the history of the Italian immigrant Angelo Siciliano, who would popularize the image of the bodybuilder while simultaneously, locating such a figure firmly within American popular culture. Born in 1893, Siciliano came to prominence in 1921 when he won “The World’s Most Beautiful Man” contest organized and sponsored by Macfadden. Siciliano had changed his name shortly before he won Macfadden’s first contest. While walking on the beach, a friend commented that Siciliano resembled a statue of Atlas which was placed on top of a local hotel. He liked the name, which symbolized strength and power; it also had the advantage of sounding American as with his other adopted name of Charles.¹ In 1928 Atlas met Charles Roman,