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**BODIES
IN TRANSITION**

I'm walking on a treadmill. This product from the "Workspace" edition of the Capital Sports company was developed to let people walk at their desks, and thereby compensate for what would otherwise be a lack of movement at digital work stations. In complex economic contexts demanding high levels of worker commitment, extended walks or jogs in landscape simply take too much time. But here, the movement—the walking—becomes part of the work. The treadmill is designed for the greatest possible efficiency.

This story somehow leads back to the age of the industrial revolution. The treadmill itself—the predecessor of this exercise equipment—was invented in England. It was set up in a correctional facility. "The original treadmill was a large wheel with sprockets that served as steps that several prisoners trod for set periods. It was meant to rationalize prisoners' psyches, but it was already an exercise machine. [...] [But] it was the exertion, not the production, that was the point of the treadmill."¹ The monotonous movement was intended to reform the inmates. Today the treadmill is intended to reform work stations.

The treadmill integrates bodies directly into a constellation that merges movement with work. Its automated system compels the body to move continuously: movement without a horizon, isolated from the landscape; rationalization and a perfect dynamic directed at being productive. Absolute productivity.

The treadmill recalls a conveyor belt at a factory or a mine. While the treadmill stands for self-improvement in neoliberal life structures, conveyor belts have traditionally

been used to accelerate the industrial production of goods.

What the treadmill shares with a conveyor belt in a mine is that both do away with the landscape. Conveyors have hollowed out the landscape below ground and removed the landscape above. The end of mining was accompanied by the loss of work and social structures, as well as of natural landscapes.

Back to the age of the industrial revolution. A transition from agrarian to industrial societies has been underway since the second half of the 18th century. Economic and social relations, and

¹ Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*. New York: Penguin 2000, p. 260.

working and living conditions, have changed in fundamental ways.

In 1914, the Berlin-based author Lu Märten analyzed this societal transformation in her book *Die Künstlerin* ("The Female Artist"). "We saw that the development of large-scale industry, with its revolutionary changes to the means and methods of production, was transforming all manual labor and craftsmanship, all individual and collective labor, into societal labor, and giving rise to women's labor as a societal and mass phenomenon." However, "of all this societal labor, women's labor was the most disqualified, and continues to suffer from this devaluation of its qualitative, intellectual,

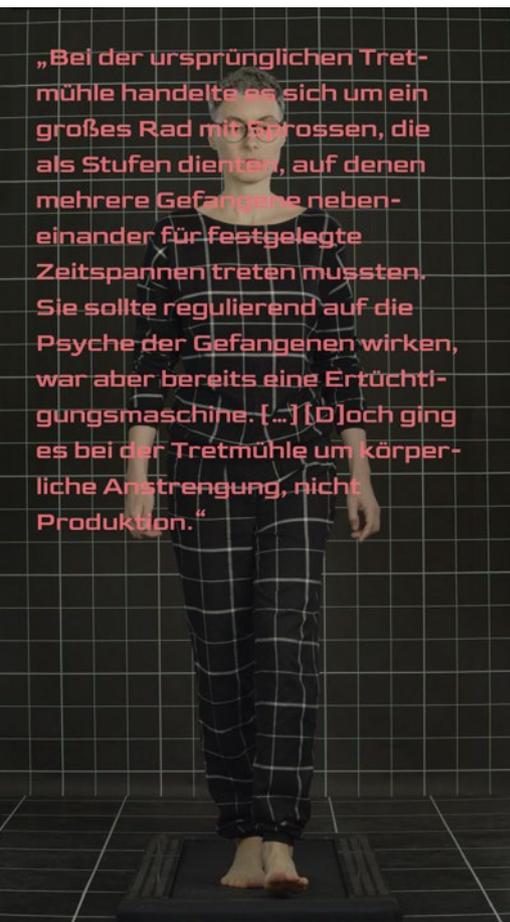
technical and artistic achievements to this day."²

In the course of industrialization, proletarian women emerged from the invisible sphere of private housework to also work in factories. But they were paid less than men. Explanations for this phenomenon can be found by looking further back, to antiquity. As Hannah Arendt writes in *The Human Condition*: "It is only from the late fifth century onward that the *polis* began to classify occupations according to the amount of effort required, so that Aristotle called occupations the meanest 'in which the body is most deteriorated'. [...] [A]ll ancient estimates [...] rest on the conviction that the labor of our body which is necessitated by its needs is slavish. Hence, occupations which [...] were undertaken not for their own sake but in order to provide the necessities of life, were assimilated to the status of labor."³

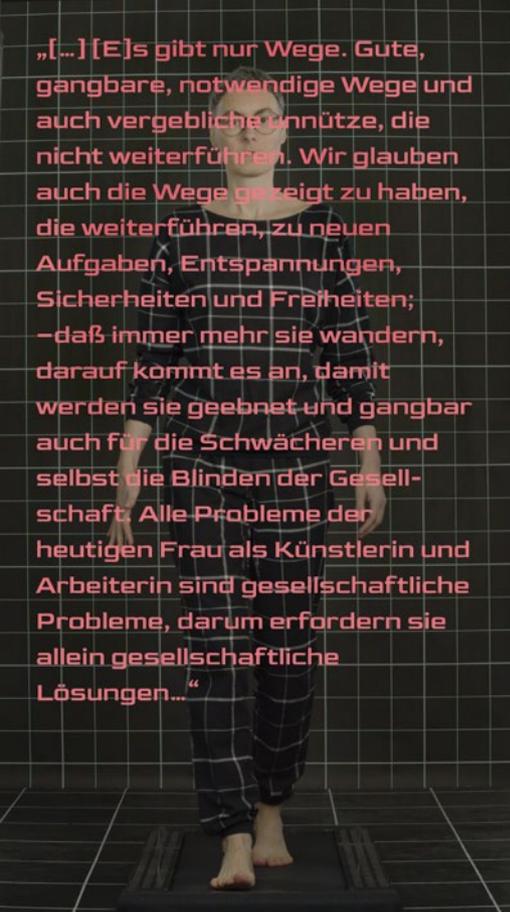
Extensive explanations of the social and economic conditions underlying the development of capitalism in Europe in the 16th to 17th century can be found in Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch*. She shows how bodies were turned into work machines and women were subordinated to the requirements of producing more workers. "But the economic importance of the reproduction of labor-power carried out in the home, and its function in the accumulation of capital became invisible, being mystified as a natural vocation and labelled as

² Lu Märten, *Die Künstlerin*. Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag 2001, p. 15f.

³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1958, p. 81ff.



„Bei der ursprünglichen Tretmühle handelte es sich um ein großes Rad mit Sprossen, die als Stufen dienten, auf denen mehrere Gefangene nebeneinander für festgelegte Zeitspannen treten mussten. Sie sollte regulierend auf die Psyche der Gefangenen wirken, war aber bereits eine Ertüchtigungsmaschine. [...] [D]och ging es bei der Tretmühle um körperliche Anstrengung, nicht Produktion.“



„[...] [E]s gibt nur Wege. Gute, gangbare, notwendige Wege und auch vergebliche unnütze, die nicht weiterführen. Wir glauben auch die Wege gezeigt zu haben, die weiterführen, zu neuen Aufgaben, Entspannungen, Sicherheiten und Freiheiten; –daß immer mehr sie wandern, darauf kommt es an, damit werden sie geebnet und gangbar auch für die Schwächeren und selbst die Blinden der Gesellschaft. Alle Probleme der heutigen Frau als Künstlerin und Arbeiterin sind gesellschaftliche Probleme, darum erfordern sie allein gesellschaftliche Lösungen...“

↪ women as artists and workers are societal problems, which can therefore only be solved by societal means.”⁵

‘women’s labor’. In addition, women were excluded from many waged occupations and, when they worked for a wage, they earned a pittance compared to the average male wage.”⁴

I walk on the treadmill, but do not move forward.

As Lu Märten writes:

“[T]here are only paths—viable and necessary paths, and also futile and useless ones that lead nowhere. We believe we have also shown the paths that lead on, to new tasks, recreations, safeties and liberties; it is a matter of ever more people walking them, which smoothens them and makes them passable for the weaker members of society and even the blind. All today’s problems for

⁴ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch. Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. New York: Autonomedia 2004, p.75.

⁵ Lu Märten, *Die Künstlerin*, p.106.

The grids behind me and on the suit I’m wearing recall photographic and film settings from the 19th and 20th centuries.

Since the beginning of photography, grids have been used as backdrops in contexts such as anthropological studies. People from different regions were photographed in front of a grid, enabling bodies to be compared and measured, and ostensible categories to be determined.

Grids were also used as photographic or film backdrops in works such as *Time and Motion Studies* by Lillian and Frank Gilbreth, a married couple of researchers.⁶ They filmed the movements of workers with the aim of documenting, comparing and improving work processes. The processes were split up into short, repetitive segments.

At the same time, the entire industrialized world was developing systems to make work more streamlined. Two examples are Taylorism and Fordism.⁷ These systems increased efficiency via the interplay of controlled movement, rhythm and durability.

Working bodies were integrated directly into production processes by means of reduced movements. Combined with a wage system that used piecework and bonuses, this achieved the greatest possible productivity. Some Western industrialized countries developed social security systems with life-long jobs, little unemployment, and housing settlements for workers and their families.⁸

For several decades until the 1970s, this system, which was used to structure work and life, enjoyed success and reinforced a pronounced separation of roles. Men were assigned to go to work, and women to be at home.

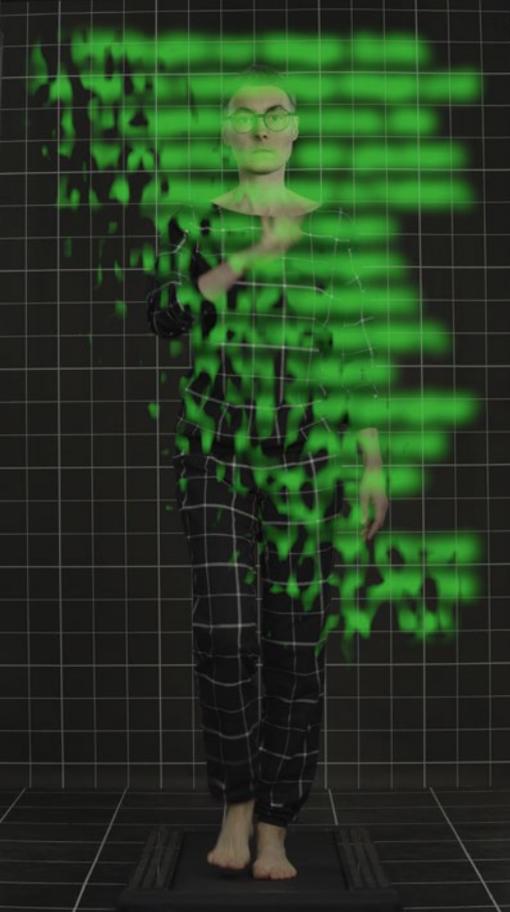
In this binary gender concept, male bodies were largely expected to work at factories or mines or to do desk jobs at companies. Their work was rewarded with wages. Female bodies in capitalist industrial countries were again assigned solely the roles of the housewife and the mother.

“We must admit that capital has been very successful in hiding our work. It has created a true masterpiece at the expense of women. By denying housework a wage and transforming it into an act of love, capital has killed many birds with one stone. First of all, it has gotten a hell of a lot of work done almost for free, and it has made sure that women, far from struggling against it, would seek that work as the best thing in life. [...] At the same time, it has disciplined the male worker also; by making ‘his’ woman dependent on

⁶ Time and Motion Studies was intended “to eliminate waste”, according to Frank and Lillian Gilbreth, until “the one best way” was found. Frank Bunker Gilbreth, *Motion study. A method for increasing the efficiency of the workman*. New York: 1911. Aus: *Junges Forschungsnetzwerk Frauen- und Geschlechtergeschichte, Time and Motion Studies: Die Vermessung von Arbeit*. URL: <https://www.univie.ac.at/fernetzt/time-and-motion-studies-die-vermessung-von-arbeit/> (version: 1 July 2016)

⁷ Discussions on the humanization of work view Taylorism as the epitome of inhumane conditions because it is characterized by repetitive movements (monotony), lack of autonomy, minimal content and therefore underutilization of human mental and physical potential. From: *Gabler Wissenschaftslexikon online*, URL: <https://www.klett.de/alias/1010818> (version: 1 Mai 2012)

⁸ In March 2020 I travelled to the Ruhr district to research in the area, including at the Krupp family archive of the “Villa Hügel” and the photographic archive of the Ruhr Museum at “Zeche Zollverein”. Visits to the region clearly showed how work had structured the lives of the population.



his work and his wage, and trapped him in this discipline by giving him a servant after he himself has done so much work at the factory or the office. In fact, our role as women is to be the unwaged but happy and most of all loving servants of the 'working class', i. e., those strata of the proletariat to which capital was forced to grant more social power. In the same way as god created Eve to give pleasure to Adam, so did capital create the housewife to service the male worker physically, emotionally, and sexually, to raise his children, mend his socks, patch up his ego when it is crushed by the work and social relations (which are relations of loneliness) that capital has reserved for him."⁹

The mid-1970s saw the rise of a global economy. Deindustrialization processes set in and brought innumerable changes to commercial and thereby also social contexts. New technologies were developed, while other industries were dismantled. Production processes were automated, and information technologies (IT) enabled faster and more precise processing of electronic data. Production was sent to other countries, i.e. outsourced. Outsourcing and flexibility were considered desirable in work and development contexts, with effects extending to social structures.

"In the crisis-fueled structural change that western European production underwent in the 1970s and 1980s, not only did 'old' industries lose plants such as steelworks, coal mines, shipyards and textile factories, but the entire sector lost influence, and employment in most branches decreased markedly. Many of the new jobless did not find work. Unemployment figures for industrial workers, including technicians and engineers, rose accordingly in Western Europe, especially during the period from 1975 to 2000."¹⁰

Neoliberal economic ideas and practices became established in the West. "In Great Britain, France, and reunified Germany, liberal guidelines formed the basis for cross-party consensus on regulatory policy: privatization of public companies, supply-oriented economic and financial policy, reduced state control of the financial sector, and cuts in welfare benefits", Lutz Raphael notes. One of the promises was the combination of "[...] a flexible model of basic welfare with economic support from the new international financial market. But the policy consensus among Western Europe's economic and political elites was deceptive in so far as it failed to address the problems arising from this model of radically open markets, and thereby disregarded alternative models of social policy and interpretation."¹¹

A culture of fitness proceeded to develop. In the 1980s, aerobics became popular. Workforces were "to become active on their own initiative and independent of the corporate infrastructure. [...] Lean people in lean companies, flexible bodies for a flexible capitalism, was the maxim at play here."¹² I saw a grid similar to the one below the treadmill on an American TV program from the 1980s, where it served as a design element for aerobics. The grid covered the entire studio space, with bodies moving on it rhythmically and dynamically.

"Enorm in Form" ("Enormously in shape") was a West German aerobics program at around the same time that often used grids in its design.

Even before that, East Germany had the program, "Medizin nach Noten" ("Medicine by music"). In the 1980s, grids were used as decorative elements for the GDR make-up line ACTION.

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Lutz Raphael, *Jenseits von Kohle und Stahl. Eine Geschichte Westeuropas nach dem Boom*. Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag 2019, p. 35.

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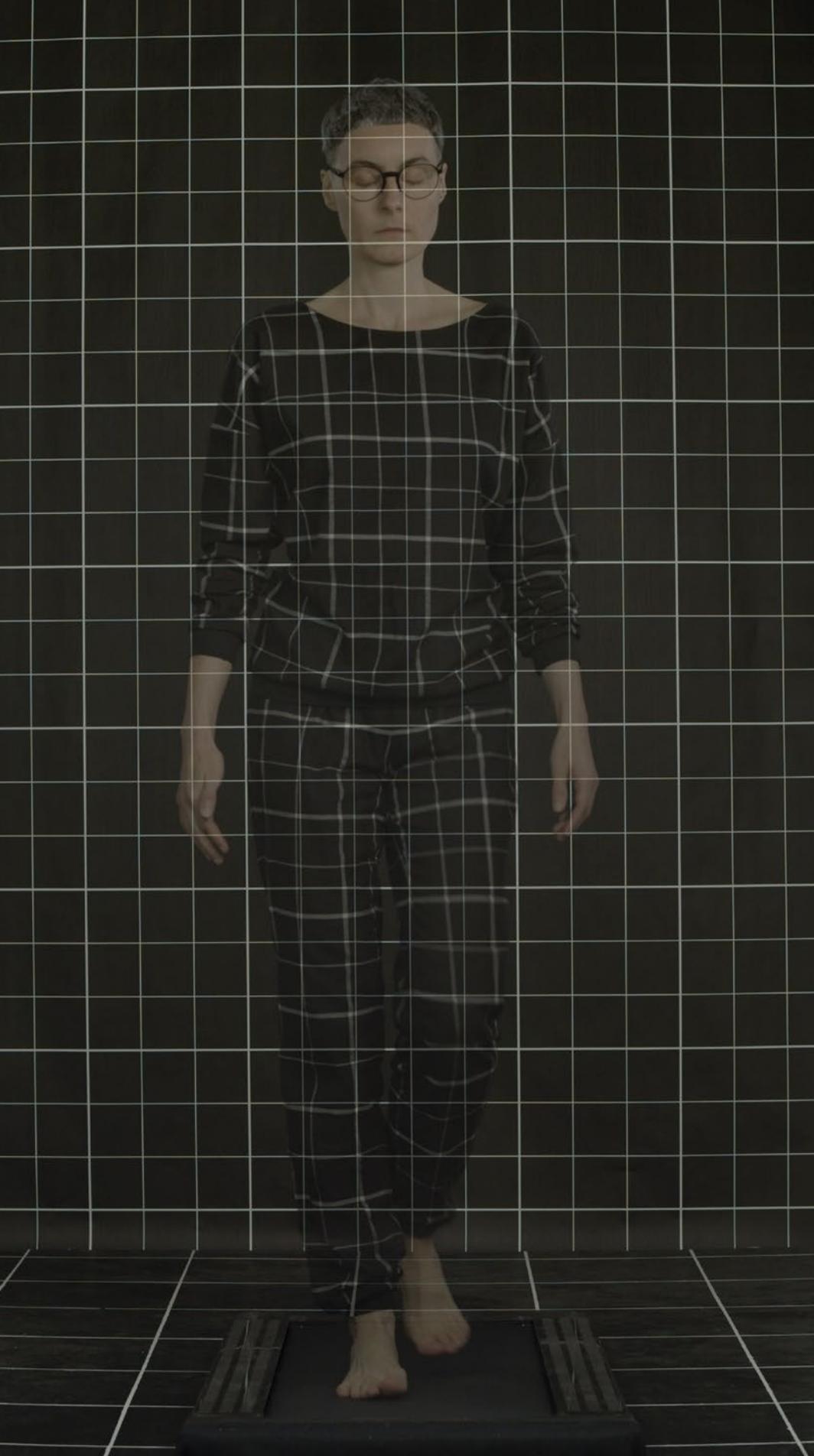
Lutz Raphael, *Jenseits von Kohle und Stahl*, p. 96.

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Jürgen Martschukat, *The Age of Fitness*. Cambridge: Polity Press 2021, p. 62.

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Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle*. Oakland: PM Press 2012, p. 17.



Aerobics has similarities to bodybuilding. Both practices seek to shape bodies. Since the 1980s, fitness has consisted primarily of design work on the body.

“In postmodernity, working on one’s body has even gained in importance and, as sociologist Paula-Irene Villa writes, ‘Bodywork is always and inevitably work on the social self’.”¹³

With the restructuring of work, the dismantling of industrial sites, and the automation of physical labor, muscles are becoming an object of beauty on one’s body and an object of prestige that one works hard to achieve.

This can be seen at places like California’s Muscle Beach. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who trained there, became famous as the “Terminator” in 1984: a cyborg—more machine than human, yet with skin and hair and well developed muscles—who was sent back in time to prevent the birth of a human leader in the fight against machines.

One year later, Donna Haraway published *A Cyborg Manifesto*. In it she notes: “Exploring conceptions of bodily boundaries and social order, the anthropologist Mary Douglas [...] should be credited with helping us to consciousness about how fundamental body imagery is to world view, and so to political language.”¹⁴

The Terminator and *A Cyborg Manifesto* appeared during the Reagan-Thatcher years, which saw the establishment of a global neoliberal economy. In the sci-fi movie *Terminator*, the arrival of the cyborg is shown by a strong male body that seems to be shaped after classical ideals. It recalls the rock-solid bodies of miners or factory workers, and brings to mind the mechanistic philosophies of the 16th and 17th century.

“[...] Descartes and Hobbes express two different projects with respect to corporeal reality. In Descartes, the reduction of the body to mechanical matter allows for the development of mechanisms of self-management that make the body the subject of the will. In Hobbes, by contrast, the mechanization of the body justifies the total submission of the individual to the power of the state. In both, however, the outcome is a redefinition of bodily attributes that makes the body, ideally, at least, suited for the regularity and automatism demanded by the capitalist work-discipline.”¹⁵

In 1984 the cyborg *Terminator* possesses the super-human powers of a machine. It is male, devoid of feeling, and utterly destructive.

Donna Haraway opposes this body image and calls for new corporeal forms and new perspectives on bodies. She recognizes the new technologies as possible ways to rethink bodies, language and communication. “Cyborgs politics are the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one

¹³ Jürgen Martschukat, *The Age of Fitness*, p. 5.

¹⁴ Donna Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*. Quoted from: *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge 1991, p. 173.

¹⁵ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch. Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. New York: Autonomedia, p. 138 ff.



code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism. [...] These are the couplings which make Man and Woman so problematic, subverting the structure of desire, the force imagined to generate language and gender, and so subverting the structure and modes of reproduction of ‘Western’ identity, of nature and culture, of mirror and eye, slave and master, body and mind.”¹⁶

In 1981, the figure of Schimanski premiered in the West German television series *Tatort*. Schimanski became well known and loved in West and East Germany, simultaneously reflecting and constructing a popular male image of the time.

“Faust auf Faust, hart, ganz hart [...] doch gib es zu, zart, ganz zart ...” (“Fist to fist, hard, very hard [...] but admit, tender, very tender ...”)¹⁷ are lines from the song that accompanied the figure. The muscular and rough, yet very successful Schimanski fought, or rather literally punched, his way through the harsh, grey industrial landscape of the Ruhr district. He had a slim, fashionably dressed, intelligent girlfriend who tolerated his escapades.

In the media’s binary concept of bodies at the time, the male ideal was to be strong and solitary, while the female ideal was to be slender and flexible. Schimanski and his girlfriend did not have a classical relationship, nor did they liberate themselves from old role patterns.

In the first *Tatort* scene, we see Schimanski from behind—a muscular and romantic figure gazing out the window at the hazy and smoke-filled industrial landscape of Duisburg. The apartment is untidy, and in a desolate kitchen he drinks raw eggs for breakfast—just like the classic movie character “Rocky” (1976), who also drinks raw eggs for breakfast before weight training. Rocky embodies the capitalist ideal of rising in society by one’s own efforts alone—with hard work and a muscular body.

“The individual is supposed to work on themselves, have life under control, get fit, ensure their own productive capacity and embody

¹⁶ Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, p. 176.

¹⁷ Klaus Lage, *Faust auf Faust*. Köln: EMI Electrola GmbH, 1985.



these things in the truest sense of the word”¹⁸, summarizes Jürgen Martschukat.

Silvia Federici questions the changing conceptions of our bodies and their interrelation with the economy: “Mindful of the social and monetary cost of disease and the fact that no one is any longer there for us— [...]—we diet, jog, bicycle, crowd fitness joints, meditate. It is our responsibility, we are told, if we get sick. [...] Social pressure is also a factor. Though no union contract stipulates it, staying healthy and having a good appearance is now an unsigned job requirement and a point in our favor at an interview or a date.

Necessity, however, is only one side of the

¹¹ present craze for remakes. [...] As difficult and costly as they may be [...] other forms of body remake may offer a more promising solution—to those who can afford them—than waiting for the development of an egalitarian society where appearance no longer matters.”¹⁹

Where in fact are the places we ourselves can shape and inhabit?

“Our dominations ... work by networking, communications redesign, stress management.”²⁰

Can we free ourselves from patriarchal role patterns and capitalist structures?

¹⁸
Jürgen Martschukat, *The Age of Fitness*, p. 3.

¹⁹
Silvia Federici, *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin*, p. 54f.

²⁰
Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, p. 245.

Video stills on the rear side of the leaflet are taken from:

BODIES IN TRANSITION

video sculpture, 4K, 23:00 min, colour, sound
two 75-inch monitors, four block weights, grid in space
Performance: Ayşe Orhon, Benno Fürmann
Funded by the VISIT programme of E.ON Stiftung

Video stills on this side of the leaflet are taken from a performance and research piece developed in conjunction with the video sculpture BODIES IN TRANSITION, which can be viewed at:



www.chabrowski.info/publications/boedies-in-transition/

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