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FITNESS INTERRUPTED

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the entanglement between embodiment and space, by unfolding the consequences of the Covid19-lockdown on fit bodies. We draw on workout diaries and phenomenological interviews with 22 Danish gym-goers and analyze their attempts to adapt their workouts and/or generate new embodiments within their new spatial conditions. We find that lockdown threatened and disrupted carefully cultivated embodiments, and generated fluctuations. We illustrate the complexity of routinized and intensive gym-centered fitness, noting that it allows a sensation of occupying a free space and being in control – a perception that extends to other domains in their demanding personal and professional lives; but, on the other hand, it nourishes an inhibitive performance-orientation that is characteristic of the late modern world. We reflect on how the attachments to fitness embodiments reveal attachments to an order that is punitive, and difficult to replace despite severely changed spatial and material conditions.

Keywords: covid lockdown, gym space, phenomenology, disorientation, embodiment, performance orientation

Fitness Interrupted

Unpredictable events disrupt the very fabric of our lives. The COVID-19 pandemic, accompanied by lockdown measures, is a striking example of a disruption that shaped the way we navigate and occupy space in the world. The body, the medium for 'being-in-the-world' (Merleau-Ponty 1962) was thrust into a situation where, on one hand, the pandemic interrupted action possibilities and socialities in many public and private spaces; yet, on the other hand, pressing demands to perform personal and professional obligations continued. This article investigates the case of Danish fitness practitioners, many of whom relied on the routinized and ritualistic fitness regimens offered by gyms (Pekkanen et al. 2017; Sassatelli 2010) to provide structure to their days, to pursue bodily strength and aesthetic ideals (Bordo 1992; Featherstone 1982; Sassatelli 2010; Thompson & Hirschman 1995; Viotto et al.

2021), and to demarcate themselves as subjects 'fit' for the demands of performance (Hakim 2015) in a competitive and precarious world (Berlant 2011). Fitness practices enable the acquisition of bodily mastery and transformation (Viotto et al. 2021), eliciting a particular sensation of one's body and its relationship to the world – in other words, *embodiment* (Merleau-Ponty 1962) – to which regular gym-goers are accustomed, and which was interrupted. This has moved us to ask: How did the spatial dynamics of the Covid-19 lockdown shape the experience and embodiment of 'fitness' for individuals who regularly worked out at commercial gyms?

This question allows us to inquire into the relationship between space, cultural values, and embodiment, as the gym and fitness activities are laden with norms and values related to the body in late modern consumer culture. The 'fit body' has become a marker of status and character (Sassatelli 2010; Viotto et al. 2021), and we see many products and services such as shapewear (Zanette & Scaraboto 2019), fitness (Kuuru & Närvänen 2019; Pekkanen et al. 2017), and diets comprising 'healthy' taste regimes (Viotto et al. 2021) that promote aesthetic norms and bodily performance ideals. Additionally, 'fitness' and other market-mediated bodily regimens have been linked to their ability to allow individuals to step outside the spaces of their excessively cognitized (Scott et al. 2017; Husemann & Eckhardt 2019) everyday lives, and push their bodies to achieve an 'intense embodiment' (Allen-Collinson & Hawton 2015) that is physically taxing but affords emotional relief. Inquiring into the experience of adapting to the closure of gyms allows us to investigate the role of spaces in attaining particular types of embodiments, and that of gym-centered embodiments in the larger scope of gym-goers' everyday lives. Moreover, it allows us to ask whether values related to fitness are prone to change when disrupted by a crisis.

Critical scholars on late modernity, including Lauren Berlant, Ann Cvetkovich, and Sara Ahmed, have written about the crisis-laden, precarious, and insecure (Giddens 1991) character of contemporary life, inspiring us to inquire into values that are inscribed upon the bodies of gym-goers. Sara Ahmed's critical phenomenological approach directs our attention to the bodily discomforts of 'aligning with' the narrowly defined norms that characterize normal personhood in Western societies, of which bodily characteristics form an important part. Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* (2011) highlights the attachments that late modern individuals develop with normative forms and practices of citizenship and personhood; attachments that they pursue in hopes of flourishing, but often engender an

‘impasse’, a feeling of being stuck, which Ann Cvetkovich identifies as a depression at a public (rather than merely individual and psychological) scale. How does the gym figure into this picture? How strong are the attachments that individuals form with spatialized fitness practices, and what other attachments does fitness support? What happens when fitness is disrupted?

It is with these concerns in mind that we unfold the complex entanglement between fit bodies and gym spaces during Covid-19 lockdown in Denmark – a country where almost 20% of the population attends a gym – in 2020. Based on diary solicitations and phenomenological interviews with 22 participants, we find that for regular gym-goers, lockdown was experienced as a disorienting force – a ‘sideways moment’ (Ahmed 2006) – with spatial qualities that threatened the cultural production of ‘fit bodies’ (Valtonen & Närvanen 2022) and removed the scaffolding that allowed our participants to act towards attaining performance goals in their everyday lives. Gym-goers were physically turned away from their carefully cultivated (but shaky) alignments with their pre-lockdown worlds, generating a practice disruption (Phipps & Ozanne 2017; Thomas & Epp 2019) that was experienced as a disruption of embodiment; this led to fluctuations in participants’ bodily practices as well as sense of wellness during their attempts to adapt to their new spatial and socio-material realities. We conceptualize these embodied (dis)orientations in three stages: (1) the pre-pandemic ‘world- as-we-knew-it’; (2) times of disruption; and (3) fluctuating (dis)orientations. Our analysis highlights the urgency and pervasiveness of bodily schemes and attachments related to health, progress, and strength that are dominant in our participants’ lifeworlds (Husserl 1970): the socio-cultural, economic, and material context that we refer to as the ‘world-as-there.’ They also allow us to investigate possibilities *and* improbabilities of different bodily schemas and orientations emerging, even during a health crisis.

We begin by presenting our critical phenomenological framework that allows us to conceptualize how fit bodies move and extend themselves within space, the ‘alignments’ that fitness activities support, and the disorientation that ensues when gym-centered movements and alignments are thwarted by the lockdown. We then turn to literature that helps us detail the qualities of embodiment at the gym, present the methods and findings of our research, and follow with a discussion of our contributions to literatures on disruption

and embodiment, as well as reflections on the role of fitness in cultivating shaky alignments in a 'cruel' late-modern context.

The Body Extending into Space – A Critical Phenomenological Approach

Disruptions within and upon the body – illness, disability, or pain – fundamentally alter one's relationship to the world and turn one's attention to the body in an unpleasurable manner (Leder 1990). Extending the phenomenological tradition, Sara Ahmed (2006) invites a critical examination of the spaces that bodies inhabit. Using the spatial concepts of orientation, alignment, proximity, and extension, she theorizes how bodies inhabit and traverse *lines* – directions in both the more literal (e.g., moving towards a particular direction) as well as a more metaphorical (e.g., moving towards and conforming to norms) sense. These lines comprise an individual's 'life-course', on which individuals 'orient' themselves by turning towards familiar objects. Ahmed's work demonstrates how spaces better accommodate some bodies than others, making the world familiar to normative bodies and strange to 'queer' bodies. In her words, spaces take the 'shape' of the bodies that inhabit it, and in turn, shape bodies. 'Queerness' in Ahmed's work designates sexual orientations that do not align with 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich 1980), but also other 'misalignments' – that is, bodies that do not conform with dominant norms, and are therefore not able to comfortably extend themselves into (i.e., inhabit and move within) spaces – in a world that is primarily hospitable towards able, healthy, white bodies. Thinking through the experiences of bodies met with hostility, Ahmed opens a perspective that makes visible the infrastructural norms of society, which are felt as spaces *folding upon* – that is, hindering the movements and flourishing of – bodies that cannot conform. She thereby invites us to think about the body, subjectivity, and space by analyzing the moments when bodies are not in line with the world.

Following Ahmed's theoretical approach, we see the body as an entity that 'surfaces' in relation to its spatial conditions (Valtonen & Närvanen 2022) and conceptualize the spatial configurations of lockdown as a disorienting force that spatially enfolds upon all bodies – even relatively healthy and privileged ones –breaking them away from the spaces they inhabit on an everyday basis. This conceptualization allows us to elucidate how individuals depended on certain socio-material arrangements – such as the gym – to be able

to traverse and 'extend' their bodies within their pre-pandemic life-courses. Everyday objects, routines, socialities, and spaces, including home, school/work, fitness activities performed at the gym, friends, and families, were some of the familiar objects towards which individuals were turned. Fitness served as an 'orienting' and 'straightening' device in the pre-lockdown world, allowing individuals to attain norms and ideals related to their bodies and minds, and performance goals vital to domains such as school or work – that is, to *align* with and to fit into the spaces of their personal and professional lives.

We consider disruptive events such as a pandemic and lockdown as 'sideways moments' (Ahmed 2006) that disrupt the 'lines' on which individuals move, pushing them 'off' their life-courses and limiting access to their 'orienting' and 'straightening' devices – but which can also potentially introduce alternative lines and life-courses. When fitness was no longer possible within the same spaces and with the same socio-material arrangements; it 'turned' bodies away from the gym into new spaces. How did gym-goers experience and embody this 'turning', and with what outcomes? In the following section we review a range of literature that helps us understand the qualities and directionalities of embodiments and alignments that take place within the gym, to better understand the qualities and directionalities of the lines that were interrupted with lockdown.

Gym Embodiments in Late Modernity

Scholarship on the body highlights the role of the market and consumer culture in boosting an ethos of the body as an object to be disciplined and 'worked on,' (Featherstone 1982; Sassatelli 2010; Thompson & Hirschman 1995). The body, in late modern consumer culture, becomes an "embodied billboard" that conveys dreams (Frew & McGillivray 2005): a space subject to discursive and material work or transformations (Roux & Belk 2019; Viotto et al. 2021), often instigated by marketplace offerings (Slater 1997). The 'body project' – the reflexive pursuit of a body that conforms to aesthetic and performance ideals – has been persistent throughout (late) modernity, while a precise definition of the 'fit body' is a moving target.

The commercial gym has emerged as *the* space where body ideals – oftentimes gendered and contradictory (Bordo 2004; Ferguson et al. 2021; Hakim 2015; Thompson & Hirschman 1995; Valtonen 2013) - are refined and pursued. Through routinized workouts (Crossley 2006; Ferguson et al. 2021) that are temporally and spatially situated within

regular divergences from daily activities (Pekkanen et al. 2017), users interact (Crossley 2006; Pekkanen et al. 2017) with each other, incorporating trainers, tracking devices, apps, notebooks, and other gym-goers to calibrate their gym routines and steer themselves towards fulfilling oft-quantified somatic goals (Kristensen et al. 2021). Gyms can bridge individual embodiments and body projects within a collective space in a way that is experienced as safe, healthy, welcoming (Andrews et al. 2005), and caring (Kristensen et al. 2021), where practitioners inspire and encourage each other (Kuuru & Närvanen 2019) and experience *communitas* (Pekkanen et al. 2017) while investing in the bodily and psychic ideals of fitness.

Towards what are gym-goers oriented? This is a key problematization in critical accounts of contemporary fitness practices, which situate the body within a context of increased risk (Thompson & Isisag 2021), uncertainty, precarity, and individualized work (Hakim 2015) – with intensive workouts such as CrossFit significant for their capacity to both physically and ideologically entrain gym-goers to withstand contemporary challenges and risks (Thompson & Isisag 2021). Drawing on this literature, we detect that gyms have ideological underpinnings which ‘impress’ themselves (Ahmed 2006) upon the bodies of gym-goers, and cultivating values such as endurance, strength, resilience, and performance-orientation within and through the body.

This, we detect is takes place within an atmosphere characterized as “cruel optimism” (Berlant 2011), in which humans pursue *objects* – e.g., love, careers, bodily improvement – in ways that are both enabling and disabling. Attachments to these objects give individuals hope and tools to persist, while also hindering their flourishing (Berlant 2011), as persistence takes place within an order that is bound to disappoint. The prevalence of an oppressive performance orientation in such contexts makes individuals vulnerable to stress and depression (Ahmed 2010; Cvetkovich 2012), and promotes the pursuit of punitive regimes such as fitness (Hakim 2015), to ‘survive.’

Complementing this problematization of fitness in late modernity is research investigating contemporary ‘extreme’ leisure activities that afford ‘intense embodiment’ (Allen-Collinson & Howton 2015): exposing the body to extreme geographical conditions and alternative temporal dynamics, such as walking a pilgrimage route (Husemann & Eckhardt 2019), or partaking in races such as Iron Man and Tough Mudder (Allen-Collinson & Owton 2015; Andreasson & Johansson 2019; Scott et al. 2017). These activities allow

overstressed and anxious bodies to step into zones of “therapeutic release” (Higgins & Hamilton 2019). Sensations like pain and sweating facilitate bodily ‘rediscovery’ and allow relief from the excessively cognitized spaces of white-collar labor. Fitness activities at the gym also offer such therapeutic-punitive forms of embodiment, albeit in a routinized and decidedly less intense manner.

But what happens when individuals are cut off from the spaces and relationalities that facilitate their fitness-oriented bodily regimens? Spotswood and colleagues (2021) investigated practice adaptations following lockdown, identifying ‘teleoaffective profiles’ that explain the rigidity of gym-goers in relation to elements that constitute their fitness practices, which then shape whether they continued to exercise after lockdown. However, these profiles do not encompass the values and bodily alignments with the larger socio-cultural context that are inscribed into the gym space, and which are also impressed upon gym-goers. We contribute to this account by centering the body in relation to the world, focusing on the sensual and corporeal dimensions of interruption: how are the punitive/liberatory attachments to the gym entangled with the messiness of ‘life-as-we-know-it’ in late modernity? Does lockdown interrupt the embodiment of these attachments? How do individuals adapt their bodily regimens?

Research Context and Methodology

Denmark (population: 5,834,950) boasts more than one million gym members, and even small towns have commercial gyms (Christensen & Flegal 2020). This picture reflects localized norms related to “the good life”, with healthism enacted through individualized practices connected to health and fitness (Kristensen et al. 2016). Yet the Covid-19 lockdown in 2020 presented challenges to the pursuit of these ideals. Curious about how regular gym-goers would adapt, in March 2020 we recruited 22 gym-goers (Appendix 1), who kept workout diaries for at least two weeks, recording their day-to-day experiences of exercise, general wellbeing, and emotional states during the lockdown. Afterwards, they took part in semi-structured interviews that used the diaries as a starting point to provoke discussion about their pre- and post-lockdown workouts, feelings, and overall well-being.

The second author began by open coding the data using NVIVO, and we collectively conducted reiterations (Miles & Huberman 1994), identifying, and discussing themes and axial codes. In line with a phenomenological approach, this stage centered our participants’

bodily experiences and sensuous registers, drawing on a conceptualization of bodies as porous, relational entities (Valtonen & Närvanen 2022) constituted not only discursively but also by their emplacement, spatial orientation, and entanglements with other materialities (Valtonen & Närvanen 2005); it also examined how the moving body extends itself into space (Ahmed 2006; Young 1980). The second and third stages connected bodies' spatial dis/orientations (Ahmed 2006) to Drew Leder's (1990) notion of bodily dys-appearance, and contextualized our findings within the larger context of performance orientation and disruption.

Findings

1. The Pre-pandemic World: 'Life-as-we-know-it'

We begin by explaining how, before lockdown, our participants were aligned *towards* and *through* the gym, to reveal what was removed from participants' lives following Covid-19.

a. Alignment *towards* the gym

In our findings, the pre-pandemic gym figures as a closed circuit in which bodies could be inscribed within an ethics of hard labor, undistracted, any time of the day. A case in point is Kirsten, who recently finished a competitive medical school education, and prior to lockdown worked out five to six times a week, starting very early in the morning:

I look fit and I train wearing smart workout clothes, I feel I fit in there and belong. I can talk to anyone. ...I feel a connection to the gym environment.

Social and material elements of the gym enable belonging; clothing, other fit(ness) bodies, the trainer, equipment, music, and decor come together to generate an evolving atmosphere (Böhme 1993; Kuruoglu & Woodward 2021) that produces an embodiment (Stevens et al. 2019) characterized by frictionless alignment with the gym. Kirsten and others – Josefine with her 'CrossFit box', and Sandra with her 'bikini-fitness' training group – experience their entry to the gym as a transitioning moment (Kuuru & Närvanen 2019) into a free and supportive space that motivates exercise and the pursuit of bodily 'progress'. They reported on bodily changes they observed through working out, which gave them

further motivation and pleasure, and which they could also feel within their bodies: the ability to lift heavier weights, better endurance, and seeing muscles getting larger. Malene, who practices powerlifting, talked about how happy she was when a leather jacket she bought some years ago would no longer fit her due to her bulkier upper arms:

There is a childish joy connected to seeing your muscles. It is so cool! It is great to see what the body can do. ...I have been able to transform my body, and my mindset around physical activities has changed.

We detect from our participants' accounts that, through their routinized visits and interactions, the gym has taken the 'shape' of their bodies; the gym-goers have been 'turned' (Ahmed 2006) towards their gyms and feel 'at home' with their bodies that have also 'taken the shape of' (ibid) the gym. The gym has become a 'familiar object' in which they are able to extend their bodies, and provides a scaffolding that extends to other spaces that are vital to the participants.

b. Alignment *through* the Gym

The routinized character of fitness was vital for participants with histories of stress, depression, or anxiety, who visited the gym for its therapeutic promise (Ahmed 2010). For many, and especially for bodies in 'trouble' (Valtonen 2013), fitness became a 'straightening' (Ahmed 2006) device, allowing them to achieve alignment with a challenging 'world-as-there'. For example, Sigrid experienced severe depression during her teenage years but found that the simple act of getting dressed and leaving her house to exercise at the gym gave her a sense of purpose. Mathilde started running as a means of coping with stress following her divorce, and eventually enrolled in a CrossFit gym. CrossFit has become a stabilizing force in her emotional well-being, and she said that deviating from her daily routine has a ripple effect on other aspects of her life.

Sissel's account especially exemplifies the entanglement of embodiment and space, as well as the 'cruel optimism' (Berlant 2011) that circumscribes fitness. Sissel is a PhD candidate in her early 30s who started working out a few years before the pandemic due to health issues, which include a seizure disorder, 'the ultimate loss of control' in her words.

She started exercising to lose weight, but soon recognized that the gym provided stability. In her words,

It takes work to build up some sort of structure, my training has been like the only consistent thing in my life. Even the PhD, that's a fluffy thing; until you have that dissertation it is not tangible at all. So [working out is] the only tangible thing I have had in my life.

Sissel's personal trainer became 'like a friend' who shielded her (Kristensen et al. 2021) from over-exercising and celebrated her progress by posting videos of her lifting weights on his Instagram profile. There was an alignment between her body, her trainer, and the gym space and its objects, a body-space arrangement in which she could observe and *feel* herself making progress. The gym became the 'happy' and 'familiar' object (Ahmed 2010) which turned her *towards the world*, gave her mastery over her body, and helped reduce pressure in professional settings, such as conferences and the classroom, as the following excerpt from our interview shows:

I taught a course for international students at X University, and I mean being a young female researcher can be quite. ...If you haven't taught anything before, and you're almost the same age or some of the students are older than you are, then it can be a bit intimidating to walk into a room and think, 'I own this.' But because I did the training and I was able to learn how to conduct myself, and sort of take in that space and show off, what I was able to do in a particular space, where you are being watched...

The gym shaped Sissel's bodily materiality (Roux & Belk 2019; Valtonen 2013; Valtonen and Närvänen 2022) in a way that allowed her to align with the world and develop agentic capacity, mentally as well as physically: to *inhabit* the various other spaces and fields into which she is required to extend her gendered body (Young 1980), and to traverse straight lines (Ahmed 2006) between these contexts. The gym became a therapeutic space (Higgins & Hamilton 2019) by affording intense embodiment, and for Sissel, both her body as a 'place' (Roux & Belk 2019) and the 'world-as-there' became more live-able.

Yet we also detect that Sissel pursues a 'flourishing' (Berlant 2011) within an order that valorizes certain body types, ranges of motion, and performances, an order that constituted her as a troubled body (Valtonen 2013) – a young, female, and chronically ill body in a traditionally masculine and able-bodied space – to begin with. This renders fitness and the gym as 'straightening devices' en route to a shaky and ambivalent life-course, further evidenced in accounts of how some participants are very easily knocked off-course (Ahmed 2006) when forcefully turned away from the gym and are unable to generate alternative pathways towards relief.

2. Times of Disruption: Knocked Off-Course

Covid19 generated anxieties about the state of the world as well as participants' own health, with some noting feelings such as 'intense worry and empathy, how will others deal with this?' (Sigrid, diary), '(covid) could happen to me or anyone – it is completely out of my control' (Sissel, diary). The closed gyms put a halt to the routines that produced fit bodies—a shock for individuals who were oriented towards and sought the gym, oftentimes first thing, every morning.

Upon hearing of the lockdown, many of our participants felt afraid, angry, sad, or disappointed, sometimes all at once. Louise, who trains three to four times a week, said:

I had been looking so much forward to [the day's workout] so what now? I thought [about] all the progress that I had made during the past 12 months. ... What if all that progress gets lost? I was really afraid...

Louise was apprehensive about losing embodied mastery (Viotto et al. 2021) and shared with other participants fear about how this would affect her overall wellbeing. Ahmed interprets such moments of interruption as 'knocking' individuals 'off-course'; breaking or distorting the lines that have been so carefully carved out to align bodies with the world through the gym. She says, "such moments can be a gift, or they might be the site of trauma, anxiety, or stress about the loss of an imagined future" (Ahmed 2006: 19). What we unfold through our participants' accounts is that these moments are met with fear, followed by attempts to mimic previous body-space emplacements, which then engender mixed and

sometimes fluctuating embodied states that reveal the difficulty of embracing new opportunities and letting go of the imagined 'fit' future. To that end, we first turn to illustrating the attempts at reconfiguring fitness regimens through home and outdoors-based body-space arrangements.

A. Body-Space 1: Extending the Fit Body through the Home

Most participants initially tried to maintain their workouts at home but found that configuring a mental as well as physical space, and putting together social and material elements was complicated in terms of achieving their usual type and range of movement. Some lifted weights in their gardens and enrolled everyday objects in their routines (a garden bench, garbage containers, chairs, the kids' swing, boots, water bottles), while others purchased gym equipment. These efforts indicate frenzied attempts at cobbling objects together to avoid weight gain, as well as strength, muscle, and overall performance loss.

Sissel's account is worth revisiting as she had a 'rigid' workout arrangement (Spotswood et al. 2021) and relied on the gym for wellbeing. She was on leave from her PhD position due to stress and anxiety when we interviewed her. At the beginning of lockdown, she tried to train at her apartment and experimented with chair combinations, noting that doing her shoulder presses relies on a particular bodily alignment: 'you have to sit up very straight'. It took her three weeks 'to build up a routine that would have a tempo and would yield 'results' and cultivate a satisfactory embodiment. At the time of our interview, Sissel was living with her parents in the countryside. Her brother had built a home-gym there, and her trainer 'had to get creative' to help her maintain her muscle mass. Terrified of losing the bodily and mental progress she had attained through training, she relied heavily on her trainer for workout guidance and emotional support. Being removed from the 'empowering' space (in her words) of the gym and having only distant contact with her trainer diluted her embodiment that had previously allowed her to navigate her work life, which is performance-oriented and precarious. She was, nonetheless, amongst the more successful in relocating her workouts, thanks to her brother's efforts and her strong connection to her trainer; but she admitted to being scared and stressed. We detect that lockdown threatened a fragile alignment with the world that was mediated by the gym.

Some of our participants found that translating their home into a temporary workout space required a spatial layering hindered by the home's other material surfaces and actors (children, pets, spouses). Prior to lockdown, Ellen enjoyed gym workouts as a 'space for myself,' away from the everyday life she shared with her boyfriend and three-year-old daughter. Exercising at home during lockdown was difficult with her daughter watching and interrupting. She sometimes asked her boyfriend to take their daughter outside while she exercised, noting in her diary a time when they returned earlier than expected:

I had just finished the first set when they came back, I quickly felt frustration building up. I needed to be alone. The next sets didn't turn out well because I was so annoyed.

Suddenly workouts had to fit into a space and temporality where other routines and human actors are configured as more central (e.g., children, spouses), yet are irrelevant or even contradictory to the workout regimen. This introduced an unpredictability which replaced the sensations and feelings of 'liberation' and 'control' attained at the gym, generating instead a bodily tension that is out of place for a workout. Moreover, these objects, such as the family and the chairs which were familiar (Ahmed 2006) in the flow of everyday life, suddenly become unfamiliar hindrances that prevented our gym-goers from adequately extending their bodies into space.

Many participants also noted being unable to facilitate some of the quantified aspects of their fitness routines. The sensations that participants 'miss' indicate the extent to which the embodiment of the 'fit body' relies on the gym's socio-material and spatial arrangements, and especially equipment like heavy weights that are hard to purchase and store at home. Sissel emphasized that her trainer calculated she had to perform many more repetitions with the lighter weights to allow her a satisfactory sense of 'progress'. Lennart similarly longed for sensations that came with lifting heavier weights, and tried to maintain his performance by adjusting the number of lifts, as he noted in our interview:

I miss the sensation of lifting something heavy. I now [have to] do ten repetitions instead of five. It is a different sensation in the body. It feels different with less weight. It's okay, but it's just not what I want.

Elinor also noted in our interview that she used kettlebells while running and exercising in her yard so that her muscles 'feel tired' as they had at the gym. She was troubled by the 'decay' (her word) of muscle mass, which she had 'worked hard' to build prior to lockdown. As Josefine, a student, explained:

I'm tired of only having a kettlebell. So I've been looking for resistance bands, elastics for pull-ups and dumbbells. ...everything is sold out! ...I found a resistance band that satisfies me; it gives up to 16 kilos of resistance.

Josefine managed to re-insert some sociality in connection to her training, as she and her flat mate worked out together. However, she missed sensual elements of her gym experience:

...lying flat on the ground, with a bare stomach and sweating like hell and being totally dead ...a coach who is yelling at you and pushing you. Something you might think sounds terrible. But I miss it!

These elements created 'impressions' (Ahmed 2006) on participants' bodies prior to lockdown and shaped what they expect from a workout. This in fact contradicts Drew Leder's (1990) argument that bodily pain or uncomfortable exertions are experienced as 'dys-appearance' – an unwanted reclining away from the world. At the gym, pain and exertion were desirable bodily sensations offering relief from the demands of the world, and, at the same time, allowing bodies to extend (Ahmed 2006) themselves in a more confident and resilient manner *towards* the world in contexts outside the gym. The trainer's yelling - an unpleasant sonority – was emplaced within an arrangement and complemented the physicality of being at the gym and experiencing other sensory elements. As such, even unpleasant sensations became 'happy objects' (Ahmed 2010) that participants missed and could not replicate outside the gym. The absence of these impressions had a disorienting presence, as Sandra noted:

It might be that you can push yourself at home. But it has not been the same [for me] and I have not felt it as a free space. Rather it's a huge burden to have to stand at the balcony and pull some elastic bands.

The balcony did not scaffold and orient Sandra's 'bikini-fitness' practice like the gym. Similarly, Yanina said, 'When you are used to heavy weights and you don't have them, then it feels like nothing.' The impressions upon their bodies (Ahmed 2006) formed before lockdown were empty, and instead of engendering a 'fun' or pleasurable bodily salience, fitness had turned into a burden – one to which Sandra, Elinor, Josefine, and Ellen were still attached. The body *now* came into unpleasurable focus, a la Leder's (1990) dys-appearance. We also saw this in other accounts, as participants could not extend their bodies (literally as well as figuratively) into the pre-lockdown lines they had carved. Being stripped of the external spatial and material structures that used to support the body was often accompanied by an inner struggle.

In sum, many found the home a space that was too familiar but also with elements of alterity for fitness. The home has literal and figurative walls; lacking some elements, yet containing a layering of other materialities and socialities, it simply does not allow extension into and alignment with the world. There is a bodily 'emptiness' that comes as the impressions left by the gym on their bodies before lockdown are left unfulfilled. This is a generally shared experience, but is even more salient for participants who had turned to the gym for its therapeutic promise and its role as a straightening line (Ahmed 2006) that offers 'control'.

In some participants' accounts, however, there are glimpses of other possibilities. We turn to a second narrative that has emerged in our findings, that of turning the body towards the world through exercising outdoors.

B. Body-Space 2: Fleeting Outdoor Alignments

In Denmark, the early months of the lockdown featured unusually warm and dry weather and few restrictions on outdoor activities. Participants experienced the outdoors as a space of possibilities, and were able to experiment with exercising in gardens, parks, the forest, and on public outdoor workout equipment. They took up activities like walking, cycling, or running that were not central to their regimens before, as exemplified in Niels' account. An

avid CrossFitter and personal trainer, Niels discovered a new form of embodiment while exercising outdoors, as he notes in his diary: 'I did pull-ups and push-ups in the sunset. Completely and utterly ZEN-like,' which indicates an intensely pleasurable alignment of body and space, allowing for a spiritually and bodily fulfilling experience. He also remarked in his interview that thinking about how he could use his backyard was exciting; it allowed him to get away from some of the peer pressure at the gym, while the break from his pre-lockdown routine enabled him to gain new strengths and skills – an attitude which turned crisis into an opportunity to continue to extend one's body into new spaces and domains and could still be framed within a mindset of 'progress'.

Alexander was a fairly new gym user before lockdown. He experienced the pandemic as a 'confinement to the same spot' and a 'loss of rhythm' which was accompanied by an overall drop in motivation. Several others noted '*tiden flyde ud*' (time flew out) during lockdown; the everyday lost its defining features of continuously small ruptures and change of pace through bodily movements throughout the day. Alexander was able to re-insert pleasurable ruptures by stepping outdoors for a workout or a walk with his boyfriend and their dog. Nicoline sometimes cycled up to 45 km a day, making stops along the way and enjoying the sights, noting, 'I know that I am privileged to feel this way, and there are many who do not find as much joy and peace in being by themselves.' She found that when she did not go outdoors, she did not sleep so well at night. The layering of work, leisure, social activities, and workouts at home led many to experience it as an enfoldment of space upon their bodies (Ahmed 2006), but the outdoors also became a more hospitable 'there' towards which the body could extend itself, instead of turning disturbingly inwards (Leder 1990).

The outdoors also re-inserted routine into some of our participants' lives, as in the example of Clara, who regularly walked the same eight km path to remove some of the unpredictability of the pandemic:

... it's a beautiful walk, but the reason I walk the same way is especially because I can create a routine. When I walk this familiar walk I know exactly which way I'll go, when it's up and down and approximately how many people I will meet, and how long the trip is. ...it's a hopeless attempt to obtain some kind of control in this time where so much is a mess and unpredictable.

We interpret 'control' – commonly expressed in interviews – as an ability to (re)create alignments with the 'world-as-there'. We see Clara's repetition of her walking route as carving a new intimacy with the world-as-there through a bodily regimen that is qualitatively and quantitatively different from the one she maintained before: not through the 'straightening' qualities of the gym, but through lighter routinized movement. We see later that Clara (and others) experienced fluctuations in their attempts to carve these new lines, and for many, these lines are weaker than the ones which oriented them prior to the pandemic.

Some participants succeeded in combining the outdoors with a regular fitness practice that allowed them to maintain alignment within their lifeworlds. Oskar was a CrossFitter and, along with Alexander, one of the few participants who did not identify himself as having pursued therapeutic benefits for mental health at the gym. Experiencing outdoor exercise as different, 'not quite as good' as CrossFit, he noticed that he was losing some of his strength, while getting better at some of the exercises and endurance. Despite missing his gym-mates and unable to replicate his full workout regimen, he found value in being able to train outdoors, find creative ways to use public workout equipment and green spaces, and enjoy the fresh air and an intensified camaraderie with his flat mate/workout buddy. He notes:

... it is super important for me to train as much as usual, even if my CrossFit center is not open. At first I thought a lot about how annoying it was, but now it's just the way it is, and then it just has to become part of the good routine to burn yourself out in two hours of outdoor training a day instead of indoors. The difference isn't that big when it comes down to it. I get to work on some weak points I wouldn't otherwise dedicate so much time to, and then of course I lose something on the heavy lifts and work with a bar.

An ambitious student, he was writing his master's thesis, so lockdown reduced distractions and offered stronger alignment with his studies rather than destroying the lines between Oskar and the world. As he wrote in his diary,

As I also mentioned yesterday, these good routines mean an insane amount to my psyche. When we hit Monday, I have to get up at 07, to get started with specials, and I would like to work approx. 6 hours on the thesis during the day and spend approx. 3 hours of training (planning, transport, and execution). So these routines take up most of the day, especially when you eat as regularly, often, and calculatedly as I do.

For Oskar, the 'straightening' qualities of exercising involved elements that he could replicate through alternative body-space arrangements, rendering his new embodiments pleasurable. He remained open towards the world instead of dys-appearing (Leder 1990) into himself.

The outdoors, like the home, has an unpredictable spatial structure, offering neither the full bodily regimen possible at the gym nor the intensely quantified pre-lockdown workouts. For some, this presented an opportunity to carve out and align with new regimens through new body-space relations, as the outdoors introduces a horizon of bodily expression and physicality that differs from the logic of the gym. These newly discovered or cultivated alignments are less performance-oriented and may come as a relief but may also be experienced as only a stop-gap solution or even a burden. 'The-world-as-we-knew-it', seemingly 'paused', continued to haunt many participants.

3. Fluctuating (Dis)orientations

What was common to many of the participants was the instability of both their moods and overall sense of wellness throughout the period they kept diaries. The notion of fluctuating (dis)orientations best describes how participants at times experienced sensations of 'alignment' including relief, bliss, and simple contentedness with their newly forming activity routines, contested by feelings of despair and bodily discomfort, sometimes within the span of the same day. Those who experienced a higher degree of satisfaction with new bodily regimens and enjoyed the possibility of inhabiting outdoor spaces also experienced times of relief to be stepping away from a strict workout regimen. Some discovered non-fitness activities that gave them immense pleasure, such as baking or painting canvases. Arthur found new joy in playing video games started *desiring* fitness again; instead of taking it for granted as part of his daily routine. Some described exercising

without tracking or noting progress and profoundly enjoying training moments, as evident in Nicoline's experience of cycling, or Niels' 'zen' workout during sunset: an orientation to working out that we interpret as being steered by pleasurable bodily sensations as well as an openness and vulnerability towards the 'world-as-it-is' during lockdown.

Yet several participants also noted that these pleasurable experiences of 'enjoying the moment' were not to be taken for granted, and many contradicted themselves during the same interview or mentioned severe fluctuations in feelings about their bodies and workouts. This was more pronounced among those already struggling with physical or mental health conditions prior to the pandemic. Sigrid, for example, was not successful with relocating her workout indoors, nor pursuing new outdoor embodiments. When her CrossFit gym closed, she rented a rowing machine, worked out with a friend at home and rowed a half-marathon in front of the TV. A week into lockdown, her motivation started to fluctuate. First she began to postpone her workouts, once completing 100 squats and 50 push-ups at 10 pm in the kitchen while preparing dinner, although recording in her diary that she 'felt great afterwards'. Her motivation decreased, however, until, around week three, she started staying in bed all day and shopping for groceries at night, moving from frenzied bodily activity into resignation and fatigue. Her internal struggles, layered with the uncertainty of the future during the pandemic affected Sigrid so much that, despite sometimes pushing herself to go out for walks or exercise at home, she descended back into immobility afterwards. Reflecting on her overall mood, she said in our interview, "It has fluctuated from day to day, but hopelessness, I think is a good keyword to describe it." The absence of structures allowing her to extend herself into the world resulted in a collapsing into herself. She was energized when trying to create new alignments – for example, through painting, but such moments were short-lived before the return of a state of being folded inwards.

Clara, on the other hand, had mixed feelings about her diminished workout regimen and 'discovered' knitting and jigsaw puzzles. She noted feeling some "relief":

It takes away some of the expectations ...I don't need to do what I did before. ...At the same time I am looking forward to getting started again and excited to see how it will be. If I will work out five to six times a week again.

Clara's words suggest a relative openness towards the world with these words; while temporarily relaxing into alternative body-space arrangements, she still experienced a lingering apprehension related to the future. Yet a few minutes later, in our interview, she countered this 'relief' sentiment by commenting that her body feels 'weak and inflated ... it looks like a cream bun, and I hate it. I just feel like hiding in a sweater.' Sandra, the bikini-fitness practitioner, also spoke of the 'flattening' of her muscles and 'missing the pump' that accompanied her bikini-fitness workouts prior to the pandemic.

Mathilde explicitly reflected on these fluctuations at the time of our interview, saying she spent most of the day on her couch playing Candy Crush and missing her gym workouts. Like a number of other participants she went from feeling 'fully in control' one day to 'completely down' the next, and detected weight gain and muscle loss that rendered her body an unfamiliar place (Roux & Belk 2019). Somatic patterns were another issue, with some participants experiencing fatigue, sleeping less or longer, and having a fluctuating appetite. We interpret these as unpleasurable forms of "dys-appearance" (Leder 1990) wherein bodily materialities and sensations become uncomfortably salient, as opposed to the pleasurable 'progress' participants experienced through fitness practices before lockdown.

Bodies until recently oriented to hard physical exercise were therefore put to use in other ways by turning towards new spaces and activities – or sometimes inactivity – which engendered embodiments without the bodily-instrumental qualities of muscle-building or weight loss/maintenance. While this holds the potential for a shift away from performance-oriented alignments with the world, for many participants the pull of the world did not change and the shift towards alternative arrangements or inactivity was fleeting. Worry about weight gain and muscle loss indicated that it was also too early to talk about a taste transformation (Viotto et al. 2020), despite the presence of a health crisis that could render such concerns insignificant.

In sum, we see that there is often inconsistency in the participants' responses to lockdown over a period; with two types of 'fluctuations' that run across the shaky lines that are established through post-lockdown embodiment. Firstly, participants who managed to integrate their workout regimen to their new spatial configurations sometimes found body-space (especially body-outdoors) alignments to be supportive and satisfactory, but they also detected contrarities between the home/outdoors and the gym, making the former

inadequate to support their body in its previously fine-tuned and quantifiable level of fitness within and towards the world. Secondly, those who pursued non-fitness-oriented embodiments (including inactivity) oscillated between 'sticking to' and drawing support from new embodiments and feeling the lack of support; fluctuating between an openness towards the world and an embodiment that is 'folded in'.

We now turn to discuss our findings in relation to scholarship on the body, embodiment, and disruption, and draw implications for understanding the role of fitness and other attachments in the late modern world.

DISCUSSION

In this article, we highlight the role of embodiment in consumption experiences by showing the centrality of spatialized bodily practices to pursuits of alignment (Ahmed 2006) with the normative spaces and performance ideals of late modern life (Berlant 2011; Cvetkovich 2012). We investigated how regular gym-goers adapted their fitness practices to the spatial reconfiguration brought about by the Covid-19 lockdown, attending to the changes and fluctuations in their embodiments through 'fitness'. We found that gym-goers were initially disoriented by lockdown, and attempted to configure new body-space arrangements that allowed for a satisfactory embodiment. In the absence of the 'impressions' and 'orientations' made possible by the gym, it became very difficult to maintain the particular materiality of the body (Valtonen and Närvänen 2022) and the accordant embodiment of pre-lockdown times, despite participants' attempts to respatialize their praxis or the insert alternative materialities and socialities. This left a sense of emptiness in their bodies – changing its materiality and its relation to the world – and for many, this was accompanied by degrees of estrangement from their everyday lives that were no longer scaffolded by gym workouts.

The reactions of our participants to lockdown demonstrate the interdependence of space and embodiment in the context of routinized, high-performance workout regimens. We thereby explicate how commercial spaces – with their socio-material arrangements – are imbued with values that mirror the 'world-as-there' but also have the capacity to offer free zones where individuals can cultivate control and mastery over their bodies and, by extension, their lifeworlds. By drawing on a critical phenomenological approach, we extend

consumer research on fitness and other commercialized bodily regimens: in addition to pursuing (ever-fleeting) bodily mastery (Viotto et al. 2021), gendered aesthetic ideals (Featherstone 1991; Zanette and Scaraboto 2019), experiencing *communitas* (Pekkanen et al. 2017), or demarcating status (Viotto et al. 2021); exercising at the gym scaffolds a relatively stable and controlled bodily presence *within* and relationship *to* a performance-oriented world, allowing the individual to align with it and, metaphorically and physically, ‘straighten up’ and extend themselves into other lines they traverse and spaces they occupy outside the gym such as work, school and family. It does this by cultivating physical and psychic strength and enabling routinized escapes from the demands of everyday life *into* the physical and psychic demands of the gym routine.

Covid-19 and other disruptive ‘events’ (Phipps and Ozanne 2017; Spotswood et al. 2021; Thomas and Epp 2019) interrupt habitualized practices and generate ‘ontological insecurity’ (Giddens 1991), as they introduce understandings that ‘life-as-we-know-it’ is impermanent and forces individuals to adapt their practices to new socio-material-biological realities. We contribute to this literature by bringing the embodied dimension of disruption to the fore: disruption is *embodied* and, concomitantly, disruptive events *interrupt the modes of embodiment* to which individuals have become accustomed and on which they rely. Moreover, we contextualize disruption within a larger socio-economic order that surrounds individuals, in which idealized bodily characteristics and high performance orientations are valorized and pursued through specialized spaces and bodily regimens. Investigating the possibilities that, in such interruptions, new body-space alignments and embodiments could be pursued, our findings present a complex picture that we approach in three spatial modes.

Lockdown – the ‘**time of disruption**’- was experienced by many gym-goers as an ‘enfolding’ of the world upon their bodies, without the scaffolding of the gym that would normally allow them to push back. Responses to this spatial enfoldment are what we term ‘**alternative body-space alignments**’, where even though some participants were satisfied with their new workout arrangements, many experienced discomforts that is akin to disappearance in Leder’s sense: lines (Ahmed 2006) were now crooked or broken and turned some participants towards inaction, while others nonetheless tried to push back despite less satisfactory workouts and remaining open to the world.’ We found oscillations in participants’ abilities to settle into new alignments, which we have termed ‘**fluctuating**

(dis)orientations', characterized by temporary settlements into new activities and accordant body-space arrangements accompanied by a satisfactory embodiment and a general sense of wellness; followed by unsatisfactory embodiments, which for some engendered (temporary or long-lasting) inactivity and despair. We detect that these fluctuations reveal the strength of prior attachments to body-space arrangements and worldly-alignments; and also the reliance on an embodiment within particular social, material, and spatial arrangements (Stevens et al. 2019)

We note that our participants pursued gym-facilitated embodiments in a context that valorizes a narrow range of achievements and bodily characteristics as 'progress', 'success' and, 'healthy', casting a great deal of bodies 'in trouble' (Valtonen 2013). We see that even individuals who, to some extent conformed to these values and ideals had trouble maintaining their alignments, and relied on straightening devices such as the gym in the pre-pandemic world. Being knocked 'off course' was met with cautious optimism at best and a state of severe unwellness at worst, with some gym-goers finding it impossible to re-configure or find alternative devices to orient themselves. We thereby detect that 'fluctuating (dis)orientations' are not just relevant to this lockdown situation. They are symptoms of a world which already generated vulnerability (Berlant 2011) and the reactions to lockdown highlight the instability of supportive devices. Covid-19 was, for many, not the only or the first event to throw our gym-goers off-course in their lifetimes, but it is one that severely broke or destabilized already-shaky alignments.

Fitness is a 'straightening' device that affords 'optimism' (Berlant 2011) - for conforming as well as non-conforming bodies – but it is also a fragile and inconsistent one that reproduces conditions of the 'impasse' (ibid) in which bodies are stuck and which, within the larger picture, is an impediment. The precarity, performance-orientation, and other demands of the 'world-as-there' towards which bodies became aligned, ensure that alignments are rarely secure. The 'there' has the qualities of being precarious and ever-changing – mirroring the difficulty of attaining a 'fit' physique, whose definitions and motilities always change over time. The gym does cultivate a 'stronger' and 'fitter' body from which the individual is able to act outwards, towards the world (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Leder 1990), but the registers through which it operates (especially its valorizing of quantifiable performance) is also a conduit to the maintenance of the 'world-as-we-know-it'. The lockdown, as an interruption, presents only fleeting capacities to create the basis for

new sensual corporeal experiences, new body cultures, and new bodily alignments. Our findings indicate the extent to which pre-lockdown performance norms - 'straight lines' (Ahmed 2006) are ossified, particularly in the absence of structural change that removes the requirements of performance and 'fit'ness, even during a global health crisis: the 'world-as-there' is, despite spatial restrictions, still inscribed with the insecurity-inducing values and the demanding ideals of the 'world-as-we-knew-it.'

To summarize, we offer the following nested contributions. First we elucidate the role of space in embodied consumption experiences – highlighting the co-constitutive relationship between contemporary values and space, we reflect on how spaces impress themselves on bodies. Second, we draw on the role of these spatialized embodiments in scaffolding alignments with lifeworlds that are increasingly performance-oriented and demanding world, thereby contextualizing spatialized values and practices within the larger socio-economic order. Third, we contribute to literature on disruption and adaptation by drawing attention to the role of the body and embodiment (particularly in their relation to spaces) in experiencing interruption and also reconfiguring bodily regimens. We note that unsatisfactory re-configurations are grounded in the body *within* its socio-material environment – especially due to a lack of embodiment that individuals rely on to navigate their lifeworlds. Finally, we use interruption and disorientation to interrogate the attachments that are characteristic of late modern life and draw on critical scholars to question the role of bodily regimens such as fitness, in reproducing an inhibitive performance-orientation.

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