



# The Circuit Trainer's Habitus: Reflexive Body Techniques and the Sociality of the Workout

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In this article I discuss some of the findings of an on-going ethnographic study of two once-weekly circuit training classes held in one of the growing number of private health and fitness clubs in the Greater Manchester area. This study forms part of a broader investigation of 'reflexive body techniques' (see below) and body-projects. For the purposes of the present article, however, the circuit training classes alone are my focus. The article has four aims.

My first aim is to demonstrate and explore the active role of the body in a central practice of body modification/maintenance: i.e. circuit training. 'The body' is an object in practices of modification. It is reflectively thematized and worked upon. But it is equally a subject or agent in such practices. Embodied agents work upon themselves, upon their own embodiment, in body modification projects. The 'I' that is aware of 'my body' (qua embodied 'me')<sup>1</sup> is my (active and changing) body. Moreover I modify and maintain myself, qua body, by way of bodily activities or 'reflexive body techniques'.

As in Mauss's (1979) formulation, my use of the concept of body techniques has a double emphasis. First, it emphasizes that structured forms of bodily

activity, far from being mere ‘patterns of behaviour’, embody a practical understanding and meaning. They orient to pre-reflective principles. To learn to swim, for example, is not merely to learn to perform a fixed set of movements but rather to grasp, in a practical and pre-reflective way, principles of buoyancy, water displacement, etc. It is to develop an understanding of ‘deep water’ sufficient to allow one to stay afloat and move around within it. Moreover swimming embodies a purpose and thus meaning (i.e. staying afloat and moving in a desired direction) and is performed for this purpose. Mauss does little to elaborate this important point but I hope to do so here. Second, the concept of body techniques emphasizes social facticity. As movements of the body, body techniques are biological facts and are dependent upon certain biological/anatomical structures and mechanisms. As forms of understanding, knowing and reasoning about the world they are psychological facts. But they also vary across ‘societies, educations, proprieties and fashions, [and] prestiges’ (Mauss, 1979: 101), and as such they are social facts, in the manner described by Mauss’s uncle, Durkheim (1982; see also Lévi-Strauss, 1987). They only exist insofar as agents practice them but they nevertheless pre-exist individual agents and will outlive them. They are learned, shared and, though Mauss unhelpfully stretches the case sometimes,<sup>2</sup> they ‘constrain’ agents in the respect that we do them without thinking and may have difficulty stopping ourselves from doing them or learning to do them differently. Putting points one and two together we can say that body techniques are forms of shared practical reason, pre-representational and pre-reflective forms of collective understanding which complement and interact with ‘collective representations’. In the context of circuit training this will include interacting with a variety of forms of discourse and expertise focused upon exercise.

In referring specifically to *reflexive* body techniques, I seek to draw out those body techniques which act back upon the agent, modifying him or her, and which are employed specifically for this purpose. Exercises are a key example of this. They make use of the environment external to the agent but contrary to, for example, hunting techniques, their focus is not within that environment but is rather the agent him or herself. The jogger does not seek to transform the ground by pounding it nor to get their self from one place to another but rather to modify their body by working it. Reflexive body techniques, in this respect, form a crucial aspect of what I have referred to elsewhere as ‘reflexive embodiment’ (Crossley, 2001a). Human beings are bodies, I have argued. There is no ‘mind’ distinct from the body. But we are capable, qua bodily ‘I’, of turning back upon, objectifying or thematizing and acting upon our embodied existence, generating a bodily ‘me’ (2001a). Reflexive body techniques are a crucial element in this reflexive process.

My second aim is to demonstrate that circuit training is a social structure which both shapes the activity of the agent and is shaped by that (shaped) agent, and I aim also to explore this structuration process. The practice of circuit training sediments as a durable disposition (as inclination and know-how) within the corporeal schema of those who practice it. It thereby moulds them. But this acquired disposition, in turn, is a necessary precondition for the continued existence of circuit training as a social practice. For circuit training to exist as a social practice agents must know, in an embodied and practical way, how to do it, and they must be disposed to do so.

The concept of the habitus, as defined by both Mauss (1979) and Pierre Bourdieu (1977), is relevant in this context. Mauss theorizes body techniques as habitus. They are, he claims, akin to the dispositions which Aristotle (1955) designates 'hexis', a term which translates as 'habitus' in Latin (Mauss, 1979: 101). More importantly, however, the notion that circuit training both moulds and is moulded by the agent conforms to Bourdieu's (1984) account of the habitus as a structured, structuring structure. Using this concept of habitus I will explore the process whereby agents reproduce practices of body modification (which modify their own bodies) in accordance with practical principles they have incorporated within their corporeal schema by way of immersion in those practices. It is necessary in my view, however, to open up the habitus concept by way of an engagement with the phenomenological literature on habitus<sup>3</sup> and embodied subjectivity (e.g. Husserl, 1973, 1989, 1991; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Schutz, 1964). The phenomenologists explore aspects of habitus and embodied understanding which are only vaguely alluded to by Mauss and Bourdieu but which are essential to a proper grasp of the habitual aspect of agency and social life. I do not have the space here to explicate this claim in full (see Crossley, 2001a, 2001b, 2002), but it is necessary to make three brief points. First, while phenomenologists recognize the relative stability and durability of certain of the dispositions/schemas comprising the habitus, and while the later Bourdieu, particularly in *Pascalian Meditations* (2000), began to explore the idea that the habitus of both individuals and groups changes over time as an effect of events which are experienced, interpreted and innovatively responded to, the phenomenologists generally have a more dynamic and fluid notion of the habitus as a lived-through structure-in-process, constantly evolving as an effect of the interactions of the agent or group with both others and their physical environment. Second, related to this, where Bourdieu is sometimes inclined to substitute 'habitus' for 'agent', effectively reducing agency to habitus and seeming to reify the latter, the habitus is a structure which takes shapes in the interaction of body-subject and world for the phenomenologists. It is a sediment of past interactions, innovations and

learning experiences which shapes present interactions and future projections but which can be reshaped in those contexts through innovation, accident and learning. Agency, from this point of view, consists in a dialectic of habitus and innovative bodily action. Actions shape habits, which shape actions. But for this reason agency is not reducible to the habitus. Furthermore, the habitus is conceived of as a product of the power and (largely involuntary<sup>4</sup> and pre-reflective) tendency of the body-subject to habituate and thereby 'conserve' structures of behaviour and experience which have proved significant or useful. Habitus is not an independent thing but rather a flexible dispositional structure formed within and by the body, qua inter/action system, in the context of its ongoing interactions with the world. Third, the phenomenological explication of the habitus goes much further than Bourdieu's sociology in exploring the structuration of perception, thought, emotion, action, etc. by habitus (see Crossley, 2001a).

Of course the phenomenologists fail to provide the bigger, statistical picture of the distribution of habitus that Bourdieu's work reveals (a sociological aspect of the habitus which Merleau-Ponty [1962] talks about and recognizes as essential, along with the place of the habitus in processes of 'structuration' [see Crossley, 2001c], but which no phenomenologist systematically investigates). Bourdieu and the phenomenologists have complementary strengths and weaknesses and I am not criticizing the former in a dismissive way. In the context of this article, however, it is necessary to foreground certain phenomenological concerns.

The third aim of the article is to draw out a number of aspects of the sociality of body maintenance/modification which are generally not foregrounded in either phenomenological or macro-cosmic accounts. Training is, among other things, a form of symbolic interaction (see Monaghan, 1999, 2000; Sassatelli, 1999a, 1999b; Smith, 2001), localized within specific and durable social networks. Recognizing it as such, I hope to show, can add significantly to our attempts to understand the nature of this form of body modification, as well as the reflexivity it presupposes and the body techniques and habitus which it draws upon. At the very least the habitus of the circuit trainer must not simply incline and enable them to exercise, it must incline and enable them to do so sociably. And mastery of the body techniques involved in circuit training must entail the capacity to tackle the 'double contingency' (Luhmann, 1995) incurred by having to perform them in environments which are simultaneously physically and socially structured (see also Crossley, 1995).

This third aim of the article also informs my concept of circuit training as a social structure. The structure of any circuit training class comprises not only the

body techniques involved in it and the ability of agents to weave those techniques together appropriately but also a network of differential relations between those agents. As a structural or functional account might suggest, circuit training entails roles, rules and resources that any trained agent might occupy and use. However, no circuit training class is ever composed of any-bodies. Classes are always composed of specific agents with differential ties to one another. And it is my contention that this local network is very important. It becomes wrapped around the rules, roles and resources, reshaping them in numerous ways. Players who know one another, for example, who have shared intimacies, 'do' the reproducing of the circuit differently together than they do it with those whom they do not know.

The final aim of the article is to weave these various notions of habitus, interaction and network together, revealing their practical interdependency.

### Not Docile Bodies

As an investigation of the embodied nature of practices of body maintenance and the active role of social agents in relation to these practices my article rejoins an important strand of sociological investigations of 'the body'. Studies by Wacquant (1995a, 1995b), Monaghan (1999, 2000), Entwistle (2001), Sweetman (1999), Black (2002), Sassatelli (1999a, 1999b) and Smith (2001) have each, in different ways, explored the dual nature of the embodied agent, as both subject and object of change, in projects of body modification, applying that notion to boxing training, bodybuilding, dress, tattooing, beauty treatments and working out. My article, I hope, builds upon the achievements of these writers, adding insights to those they have already begun to amass.

At the same time, the article seeks to challenge those approaches, often rooted in Foucauldian analysis, which portray the body as 'docile' in relation to body maintenance. Foucauldian inspired studies often reify practices of modification as 'technologies' or 'apparatuses', ignoring the active role of embodied agents in these practices and eliding the difference between texts which prescribe ways of acting and the more messy and complex reality of those ways of acting (see also Crossley, 1996b). I do not mean to deny that, as Mansfield and McGinn (1983) argue, workout schedules and manuals often read like passages of *Discipline and Punish*. Neither do I contest Lloyd's (1996) observations regarding the growth and role of various forms of expertise in relation to working out. However, in his methodological reflections, Foucault himself recognized the considerable gap between these written plans, with their elegance and rationale, and the rather more messy nature of their actual implementation. Plans, he rightfully argued,

are real and belong to the 'real world' but they should not be mistaken for the reality of the situations they plan for. Thus, he notes, had he wanted to know about 'real life' in prisons or other disciplinary institutions he wouldn't have focused upon Bentham and the architectural discourses informed by his 'beautiful' Panopticon plan. Or at least, he would not have analysed them as he did:

... if I had wanted to describe real life in the prisons, I wouldn't indeed have gone to Bentham. But the fact that real life isn't the same thing as theoreticians' schemas doesn't entail that these schemas are therefore Utopian, imaginary etc. That would be to have a very impoverished notion of the real ... the elaboration of these schemas corresponds to a whole series of diverse practices and strategies ... [and] ... induce[s] a whole series of effects in the real (which isn't of course the same as saying they take the place of the real): they crystallise into institutions, they inform individual behaviour, they act as grids for the perception and evaluation of things. It is absolutely true that criminals stubbornly resisted the new disciplinary mechanism in the prison; it is absolutely correct that the actual functioning of the prisons, in the inherited buildings where they were established and with the governors and guards who administered them, was a witches' brew compared to the beautiful Benthamite machine. (Foucault, 1981: 10)

My interest, in relationship to circuit training, is precisely in the 'witches' brew' that Foucault acknowledges lies outside his own field of analysis. I am aware, of course, that what happens in my weekly circuit class is shaped by the dynamic configuration of discourses, practices and social relationships comprising the science of exercise; by the biopolitics of state-sponsored health promotion; and by many factors not touched upon by Foucauldian analysis, such as the economics of the leisure industry. However, in the final instance circuit training has to be done by embodied agents in an aerobics studio. The practices which 'invest' bodies in this context are the practices of those same bodies. That is my focus. Furthermore, rejecting the possible implication of Foucault's comment on the 'witches' brew', that 'real life' is simply a poor and slightly disordered realization of a plan, I seek to show that the 'witches' brew' has more order than this term suggests and that this order stems from dynamics, structures and exigencies that fall below the threshold of visibility of an archaeological/genealogical analysis.

The article begins with a brief methodological discussion, which includes an attempt to explain the basic structure of a circuit training class. In the four sections which follow this I attempt to draw out different aspects of the bodily work that goes into producing the circuit training class before turning, in the final two sections, to questions of identity, interaction and networks.

## Analysing Circuit Training

The two weekly classes I have attended, one of which lasts for 75 minutes, the other 60, assume a similar structure. One female instructor leads the class, first through a warm-up, then through a stretch, then through a more intense aerobic warm-up, then into 'the circuit' itself. The circuit comprises a series of between 10 and 16 'stations' which are arranged around the room in a (rough) circle (i.e. a 'circuit'). A station is marked out by a card on the floor which specifies an exercise and sometimes also by the apparatus (e.g. dumbbells, a box or skipping rope) necessary for that exercise. Class participants, working in twos or threes, each select a station, which they work on (accompanied by music) for approximately a minute, before moving on to the next station and so on around the circuit. In the classes I have observed, participants will generally go around the circuit twice in the course of the session – though I have been in classes where as many as five circuits are completed. On the first time round their progress is generally punctuated (for example after every three stations) with a return for all participants to the centre of the room, to engage either in two or three minutes of aerobic exercise or five or six minutes of running/running-related activities.<sup>5</sup> I refer to this henceforth as the *aerobic phase* of the circuit. On the second time round the circuit is generally unbroken but participants will often complete it in a less straightforward way (e.g. doing every other station or moving in a one-forward-two-back pattern), or the small group approach may be supplanted by a team circuit in which one half of the class does a form of aerobic exercise while the other half does something with the dumbbells, before swapping over and so on. After completing the circuit for the final time, the instructor leads the class through a stretch and warm-down.

I have been attending these classes, purely as a participant, for over six years and my observations and reflections are rooted in experiences amassed over this period. However, for the six months prior to the writing of this paper I have adopted the role of participant observer: keeping notes, making structured observations, formulating hypotheses to test against the evidence of my observations, etc. The main body of my observations is drawn from this period.

My involvement in the health club where the circuit classes are held extends beyond attendance at circuit sessions. I attend the club at other times for an individual workout in the gym. The observations in this article, however, are all based upon activities in and around the circuit training class. This includes observation during the class but also observation of conversations: (a) between class participants in the gym before the class, (b) in the sauna and steam rooms after the class, and (c) in the changing rooms before and after the class. What I have learned from

conversations in the changing rooms is skewed by the fact that it is an all-male environment and I do not have direct access to the women's changing rooms (although my wife does the classes too so I am not completely oblivious to what goes on in there). However, in all other contexts I have equal access to men and women. This is relevant as the circuit training class is a mixed class with roughly equal numbers of male and female participants.

Given that the population comprising the class tends to alter by the session it has been impossible to be completely overt in approach. However, during the course of my observation I 'came out' as a sociologist by administering a questionnaire (not discussed in this article) to circuit training participants. As I am (correctly) known by other participants to be an enthusiast for all forms of working out this has not been viewed with suspicion, even if it has been the source of some amusement. In addition, in instances where I have explicitly asked individuals questions for the purposes of my research, I have informed them that I am a sociologist researching gym life and I have told them that the question is being asked for the purposes of research. It is important to note, furthermore, that much of the material discussed in this article was initially derived, after the fashion of Sudnow (1993) and certain other phenomenological writers (Shapiro, 1985), by way of an attempt to reflect upon my own embodied involvement in the class – later cross-checked against other observational data. It is one of the interesting features of body techniques that one can use one's own in/abilities and capacity to learn, in a manner free of the problems of introspection, to open them up and explore them. Sudnow asks:

Can the body's improvisational ways be closely described from the viewpoint of the actor, not through an introspective consciousness, but by a fine examination of concrete problems posed by the task of sustaining an orderly activity . . . ? (Sudnow, 1993: xiii)

My answer to this question, like his own, is 'yes', and much of what follows is based upon this analytic procedure.

### Circuit Training as a Language Game

I shall call the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the 'language game'. (Wittgenstein, 1953: 5)

At one level circuit training consists of a series of reflexive body techniques, configured in a sequential structure. Different stations are constituted by different body techniques (e.g. press-ups, sit-ups, dumbbell flies) and aerobic phases are constituted by sequences of techniques (grapevine, followed by knee-lifts, followed by scoot, etc.). However, mastery of the individual body

techniques involved in the session is not sufficient for successful participation in and doing of it. Circuit training is a language game, incorporating a range of reflexive body techniques as possible moves within it, and effective/competent participation presupposes 'fluency' in this language game as a whole, not merely in its component parts. This point needs to be unpacked.

The instructor, particularly during the aerobic phases of the session, shouts out, in succession, the names of various body techniques (e.g. 'grapevine', 'knee-raises', 'scoot-right'). The participants in the class respond by performing these techniques until the instructor shouts the next command. There is a clear role structure here, with specified rights and responsibilities, which all participants tacitly understand and orient to. Rights and responsibilities aren't the only tacit structures operative in this situation, however. The meaning of the commands uttered by the instructor depends upon their being heard as orders, being understood and, indeed, upon a 'feel for the game' or practical understanding of and capacity to play it. For the command 'grapevine' to achieve the desired effect, for example, all members of the class must know *how to do* the sequence of moves comprising a 'grapevine', they must hear the utterance as a command and, importantly, they must understand, in a practical sense, *the timing* of the shift into this move that is required. A slightly more explicit translation of 'grapevine' might be 'the next move I want you to perform, when we have finished this sequence, is the sequence we call the grapevine'. In order to comply with this command and stay in time, each member of the class must know when the current sequence they are involved in is supposed to end and thus when the 'next' should begin. A practical grasp of the sequencing of the required movements and an ability to slot a new move into the sequence are essential. Furthermore, it is often necessary that they modify the last repetition (of a body technique) performed in a sequence in order that they finish that sequence in a posture which leaves them ready to begin the first repetition of the next sequence – all of which presupposes that they know 'without thinking' what position they should be in to begin the next sequence. If they do not do this they will fall out of time.

A practical and embodied understanding of human agency is required to make sense of this. Knowing what a 'grapevine' is, for the purposes of the game, is a matter of practical bodily know-how rather than conceptual knowledge-that. To know what the grapevine is, is to be able to do it. Furthermore, it is to be able to do it at the right moment, without first having to think about it. The agent must respond 'automatically'. They have no time to think or plan. What we also see here is an integration of talk and motor activity within a language game. The words of the instructor call forth specific techniques from the class; action and words belong to the same 'system' or game. In addition to this, however,

corporeal subjectivity is also implicated in the game by way of the role of 'lived time'; that is to say, a sensuous rhythm of action and reaction. For an aerobic phase to be successfully executed all members of the class must perform the same sequences at approximately the same time, switching between sequences at the same time, following the order of the instructor. This cannot be achieved by verbal instruction alone. Verbal instruction presupposes what Alfred Schutz (1964) refers to as 'mutual tuning in'. Each member of the class must move at the same pace, to the same beat, punctuating their action sequences at the same point and in the same way. Typically, for example, an action sequence will be performed in a two-times-four beat. Agents walk forward for four beats, then back for four. This may involve sub-vocal counting (or even counting aloud, collectively) but once agents get 'in the rhythm', counting is not necessary. The body grasps or understands the rhythm and moves with it. The temporal structure of the class becomes a matter of a lived temporality of action. Agents move in a shared rhythm. They develop a 'feel' for the rhythm. This feel is vital to the playing of the game because the coordination of the game is dependent upon it. When the instructor orders a new move, which they may do well in advance of the point at which they expect people to perform it, everybody must change their action (or direction) at the same time if collisions are to be avoided. The playing of music aids in the construction of this intercorporeal order. Agents 'mutually tune' to one another, in part, by mutually tuning in to the beat of a piece of music (DeNora, 2000). However, as it is possible to be in time with the music but out of synch with one's consociates, the former affords no guarantee of 'mutual tuning in' in the fullest sense. The music offers beats which allow action to be intercorporeally integrated across time, e.g. in a pattern of 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, etc., but the agents involved must still decide and agree which beat in the on-going flow of music counts as the first beat that will initiate their actions.

The experience of newcomers indicates that the capacity to play this game is acquired. Newcomers plainly do not know the moves involved in the game, their motor functions do not communicate directly with the words of the instructor and they do not usually 'get into' the collective rhythm of the class during the first few classes they attend. They will often be found veering off in the wrong direction, performing the wrong exercise or changing sequence at the wrong moment (sometimes too early, sometimes too late). In some cases they need to learn specific body techniques. In other cases they need to learn to perform those techniques in accordance with the game. In most cases they need to learn both. Furthermore, they often fall foul of another temporal regularity of the class. In the course of an aerobic phase or perhaps over the course of several aerobic phases, instructors will sometimes build up small routines of sequences; e.g. they

will take the class through four sequences, intending and expecting that the class will, upon completion, return to the first sequence and run through all four again, in order, repeating the process until they are instructed to do otherwise. For experienced members of the class there is a degree of obviousness to this. Everybody 'catches on' to the fact that a routine is being built, such that they understand (pre-reflectively), at the end of one complete run through, that they return to the beginning. As a consequence of this 'obviousness' the need for verbal signalling diminishes and the fact of verbal signalling may thus diminish also. The newcomer, however, often fails to 'catch on', as they are new to the game and have no feel for it. Consequently they find themselves bemused by the fact that everybody else seems to know where to go and what to do when they do not. Moreover, this bemusement, or at least the reflection it prompts, poses further problems in itself because the rhythm of the class does not allow time for thought or reflection. To stop to think is to miss the moment, leading one to slip further out of time.

In their own way more experienced members of the class may also illustrate these embodied understandings through playful subversions of the game. Deliberately clapping at the wrong time (and the wry smiles it attracts) or anticipating the next move of the instructor before s/he has announced it are both examples of this. Other examples might be moving to more difficult or advanced forms of an exercise (which the instructor may or may not ask the class to perform) while the class as a whole is being introduced to a more simple or preliminary version. This might be performed, on occasion, for the simple instrumental purposes of stepping up the pace if an individual is in the mood for a hard session. It may, on occasion, be a way of marking out status or identity, as an experienced trainer. Alternatively, however, as with the off-beat hand claps, it may be a jokey communication to the teacher, gently mocking the predictability of the class for those who participate regularly.

The visible incompetence of most newcomers demonstrates that the habitus of the circuit trainer is both structured and structuring. The newcomer has not yet incorporated the game. Their habitus is, in this respect unstructured. That is why they are incompetent. But for the same reason they cannot reproduce the structure of the game and, were it not for the repair work of more experienced participants, may threaten that structure. In a matter of weeks they will have incorporated the body techniques and practical sense of the class. They will have the beginnings of a circuit trainer's habitus and, as such, they will play an active role in reproducing circuit training as a social practice. Not at first, however. To explore this process of structuring further we can focus in more detail upon certain spatio-temporal features of the class.

### Lived Temporality: Pacing

The circuit training session is timed at numerous levels. It has a prescribed time for beginning and ending. It consists of a series of stages, from warming up and stretching, through the  $n$  many run-throughs of the circuit, to the warm-down at the end. And each station (in theory at least) is timed either through clock time (e.g. one minute per station) or through the time of repetitions (e.g. four sets of eight reps per station). One might be tempted to say here that the body is transformed by way of its submission to an externally imposed temporal regime, much like those described by Foucault (1979). This is true but is only half of the story. The session is equally timed from the 'bottom up' by way of the pre-reflective activity of the body-subject. The most obvious manifestation of this is the way in which agents pace themselves. They distribute their effort both within any given station and across the session as a whole. As a pre-reflective activity, this only really becomes apparent when the 'ontological complicity' between the agent's bodily feel and the objective reality of the class break down. Newcomers again provide a good example of this. They have no feel for the class and are thus prone to either under- or overestimate the length of a station or session. Some of the folklore of the circuit class, for example, recounts stories of novices who have put 100 percent into the first 20 minutes of the class and then either had to leave or begun to trail drastically for the remaining period. It is only with practice that agents develop a 'feel' for the class and come to know, in a corporeal and pre-reflective sense, how to spread their effort appropriately across the class so as to end up tired or even exhausted but only at the end. Even experienced agents are occasionally thrown, however, when the length of sessions or stations is lengthened or the teacher fails to regulate the time of the class appropriately. When the class I attended was lengthened from 1 hour to 1 hour 15 minutes, for example, many participants initially complained because they were exhausted by the 1 hour stage and the additional 15 minutes was therefore either wasted, since they were too tired to use it fruitfully, or it was too much. After several weeks, however, participants adjusted. They learned to pace themselves over 1 hour 15 minutes.

The same thing can be seen at the level of individual stations. Some participants, some of the time, will count themselves through a station. They may, for example, count how many press-ups they do in the minute allowed for press-ups or they may count out a rhythm for themselves (1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2 . . .). Whether or not they engage in such explicit counting practices, however, they do not usually time the station itself in any conscious or explicit way. They immerse themselves in a flow of activity. And yet most have a lived sense of how long a station ought

to last such that they are surprised or frustrated on the occasions when their expectations are dashed. If the instructor becomes distracted, for example by a member of the class requiring help or engaging them in conversation, and thus fails to instruct the class to change stations at around the appropriate moment, participants begin to tire very quickly. Without reflective awareness they have 'prepared' themselves for exercise of a certain duration and have spread their effort over that period but this requires that they stop at the appropriate moment. Within the social order of the class this tends to prompt, in the first instance, exchanged glances of exasperation between participants, sometimes followed by shouts of 'come on', an exaggerated count (e.g. 'one hundred and three, one hundred and four . . .') or perhaps by somebody (with tongue in cheek) assuming the teacher's role and calling for everyone to 'move on'.

This is not pure temporality. The agent is not 'counting time' in an abstract sense. This is time measured against effort and against the agent's sense of their own capabilities. They 'know' in a practical and pre-reflective way just how fast to work, just what weight to use, just how much to exert themselves to take themselves to the point of exertion that they want to reach. That is to say, they have a temporal sense relative to knowledge of their self (their capacities) and of exercise, and they have a sense of their self and capacities relative to exercise and time. If this were a reflective calculation it would be a complex one, involving objective time, overall fitness level, current energy levels, current injuries, etc. It isn't a reflective calculation, however, it is an embodied feel, *a practical sense of self and world derived from immersion in practice*. Furthermore, as a practical sense it is subject to revision. It is not uncommon, for example, for agents to experience, in the course of working out, a breaking of expectations about their current capacity that they were not aware they had formed. They find the session easier than expected and thus increase their effort levels or perhaps they find that they are more tired than they had anticipated and lower their level. Indeed, there is a more or less constant process of adjustment and self-monitoring going on.

This process is crucial to the generation of circuit training as a social practice. It fits the agent to the activity of the class. If the pacing is wrong the agent will either render themselves incapable of completing the class, whether they want to or not, or will not benefit from the effect (what Foucauldians might call the 'power') of it. The agent cannot have temporal templates imposed upon them. They must actively take up those templates and accommodate themselves to them. Furthermore, this may be extended to the process of turning up to the class itself. The classes are, for some regular attenders, one element in the way in which they structure their week, a temporal landmark around which other activities in the week are placed and to which they are subordinated. It is something they

look forward to when having a bad day at work or something they brace themselves for during the day if they are tired. And it will structure such things as what and when they eat during the day, since a full meal shortly before a session is likely to make a speedy return. Again the crucial point is that they orient themselves, temporally, to the session.

### The Lived Space of the Circuit

In addition to this practical mastery of time, the circuit training class requires a practical mastery of space. A useful way in to this is by way of a brief reflection upon the equipment used, chiefly the boxes and the dumbbells. To begin thinking about these, in turn, we can begin with the bigger exercise machines used (outside the circuit class) in the main gym. These machines have been likened to medieval torture instruments in appearance. Agents are strapped into them, with different limbs being required to slot into different places. The purpose of these machines is to allow the agent to isolate and work a specific muscle or muscle group in a way which is not always possible with free weights and which minimizes the possibility of injury. To this end these machines are ergonomically designed in discourses which constitute the body as an anatomical 'object'. However, the purpose of these machines is only ever accomplished with the complicity of the agent. The machine 'affords' or 'invites' certain possibilities for action but only for an agent whose experiences and current framework of relevances predispose their perceptual system to identify those affordances and whose corporeal schema or habitus includes the practical know-how required to work the machine and thus to subordinate inert matter to a function. Just as the knowledgeable hands of the pianist are necessary to make a piano work as a musical instrument, so too with the exercise machine. Indeed, unlike the piano, which is at least a familiar instrument to most westerners, the uninitiated may not even know how to climb on to an exercise machine, what to push or pull, etc. The body must 'understand' the machine in the practical and embodied sense of enjoying mastery over it, so as to subordinate it to the purpose of exercise. The machine exists for the body by way of its readiness-to-hand.

This is truer still for circuit training equipment. Like Sudnow's piano, of which he says:

... [it] is as many sorts of places as there are activities to be undertaken with it, a rather different sort of place to the cleaning lady than to the musician who, in the course of play may see past it into the music with a look that is hardly looking at all. (Sudnow, 1993: 10)

'Steps' and dumbbells have a practical meaning in exercise but only in virtue of

the structured bodily activities and know-how, the body techniques, which appropriate and utilize them. By acting in a different way towards the equipment, using it in a different way, its meaning and purpose are transformed. A step, for example, may be stepped upon. But it may be laid upon, for the purpose of dumbbell flies, effectively assuming the meaning 'bench'. It may have one of its ends lowered (for abdominal curls or incline/decline flies), thereby becoming an incline bench. It may be sat upon qua seat, jumped over qua 'hurdle'. It may be hung off for the purposes of tricep dips, run between for a slalom. The 'hands' can make use of it for incline press-ups (narrow and wide varieties using different parts of the box), the feet for decline press-ups or calf extensions. Perhaps more importantly, however, it may be nothing but a lump of plastic to those unfamiliar with circuit training, having no obvious meaning or utility. Whatever it is it becomes only by way of the shared know-how of embodied agents; that is, by way of body techniques. Reflexive body techniques are a way of knowing both body and world for the practical purposes of using both to modify the former.

Even when doing 'the same' exercise agents may be knowingly doing something different. Although circuit training is primarily a means of improving muscle tone and cardio-vascular fitness and this is reflected in the weights used, the repetitions generally expected and the overall structure of the session, many of the exercises performed are 'the same' exercises as those performed by, for example, body builders. And agents have some degree of autonomy in determining the extent to which they will use the exercises in the session for purposes of toning, building and increasing fitness. By selecting weights which are relatively light for them and aiming at a high number of repetitions they constitute their exercise as a means of toning and may know that they are doing so. By selecting heavier weights for fewer repetitions they potentiate muscle growth. Thus, in theory, partners on a station may be doing the same exercise but constituting its meaning in a very different way. One is body toning, the other body-building. This, moreover, requires a habitual knowledge of the weight of particular dumbbells. Through experience agents learn to apperceive the weight of a dumbbell from its visual appearance, knowing (roughly) by sight what it will be possible for them to do with it. This was revealed in my study on an occasion when new dumbbells were introduced into the main gym which not only displayed their weight in pounds rather than kilos (as had been the case previously) but were made of a different and heavier material. Both myself and others found that we could not gauge weight by size, in accordance with our habitual visual-kinaesthetic schema, since smaller weights were heavier than we expected. Our typifications and schemas of practical understanding were temporarily confounded.

The stations of the circuit have no existence apart from the agents who (using their practical knowledge of exercise qua body techniques) transform particular areas of the gym, for a limited time, into 'stations'. And the same applies in the aerobic phases of the session where, through convention alone, the room assumes, for example, a clockwise flow of human traffic, or perhaps different and complementary flows. This is as much a matter of symbolic interaction as of individual bodily action, of course. The agent knows what to do at each station either by way of cards which communicate an instruction to them or by way of copying the agents who have preceded them on the station. In addition, flows are constituted by way of mutual adjustments of every agent to every other agent, preceded by one or two agents who have taken the initiative to start a flow in one direction or another. However, the point remains: the space of the circuit training class, qua training class, is instituted through the activities and interactions of the embodied agents involved in the class and the practical knowledge and understanding embodied in those activities.

### Structuring Structures, Embodied Practices

At this point it would be instructive to pause in order to draw together some of the issues discussed so far. In the first instance we have seen that the 'practices' which a Foucauldian might claim 'invest' the body are in fact 'done' by the body and done in a knowledgeable way. Of course these practices still 'invest' the body in the respect that they burn off fat, tone muscles, etc., but ethnographic analysis forces us to see this in a less reified and more reflexive fashion, in terms of reflexive body techniques which, to borrow Mead's (1967) terminology, allow the embodied 'I' to act back upon itself qua (bodily) 'me' (see also Crossley, 2001a). These practices are informed by discourses and systems of expertise whose history a Foucauldian archaeology/genealogy might be well placed to trace but the implementation of the plans and programmes outlined in these expert discourses requires the more ethnographic and phenomenologically sensitive approach deployed here. Second, the experience of newcomers has allowed us to see the role of the habitus as a 'structuring and structured structure' (Bourdieu, 1984) in this process. Agents collectively reproduce the structures of the class, the practices of body modification, but only on the basis of having first incorporated those practices through immersion in them. Habitus structures practice, practice structures habitus. Importantly however, the learning curve of the newcomer should also alert us to the necessity of 'breaking the circle' between habitus and practice by recognizing the capacity of embodied agents to extend and thus transcend their existing repertoire of habits. The newcomer incorporates

new practices and the practical and pre-reflective principles underlying them and does so simply by putting themselves in an unfamiliar situation and (after some time) 'catching on' to 'the game'. They modify their habitus. Third, a detailed reflection on the practices in question has alerted us to the practical understanding and skill involved in their reproduction, lest we be tempted to think of habitus and practices in an overly mechanistic way. Finally, we have begun to see the role of symbolic interaction in this process, not least in the context of the repair work necessitated by the gaffes of newcomers and related 'threats' to order. We are beginning to see that practice is not just 'done', 'structured' by the habitus qua 'structuring structure', but negotiated as a moral order. Of course such interactions are shaped by the habitus too. My point is: first, that the reproduction of the class requires both the specific habits of competence of the workout and a more general social competence; second, that the 'witches' brew' of actual practice referred to earlier in the article turns out to revolve, in part, around exigencies of a fluid and complex interaction order. I will expand upon this in more detail in the second part of the article. First, however, it is necessary to consider the mode of embodied intentionality proper to circuit training.

### Intentionality and Situation

The doing and making of a circuit requires more than practical knowledge. It presupposes a specific embodied intentionality in the phenomenological sense. The agent must 'tune in' to the class and 'tune out' of their everyday attitude. I have already noted the necessity, during 'aerobics', for example, that the agent get into the general rhythm of the class. They must 'let go' sufficiently to achieve this, subordinating their own rhythm of lived time to that of the group. In addition, given the unusual nature of the exercises and the demand that agents simply follow the commands shouted by the instructor, there is a minimal requirement for agents to relax their self-consciousness. Contrary to the usual attitude of most of them, they must obey automatically and without question and must 'switch off' the tendency to embarrassment which might otherwise accompany the activities they are engaged in. They must be absorbed in the activity at hand, going with the flow and overriding or relaxing the internalized controls which would ordinarily inhibit such action. Finally, they must temporarily suspend the usual habit of ceasing activity at the point at which it hurts or renders them short of breath, activating the acquired perceptual habit of experiencing the 'burn' positively (and being able to differentiate it from the pain generated by actual or imminent injury, which should still motivate them to stop). Sensations that would in most contexts be experienced as uncomfortable or painful, and as

such would tend to terminate activity must be (within a range) welcomed (on orientations to pain see Bendelow and Williams, 1995).

In an important discussion of this process of ‘tuning in’ or ‘framing’, as she calls it, Roberta Sassatelli (1999a), following Goffman (1986), argues for the importance of social rituals, props and demarcated spaces. In particular she identifies the changing rooms of the gym as a transitional space where agents move from the frame of everyday life to the frame of the workout. My own work partially supports this but it is possible to expand upon it by way of a deeper consideration of the role of the body and ritual body techniques in the process of frame-transition. Consider Merleau-Ponty’s reflection upon his ‘sleep ritual’:

I lie down in bed, on my left side, with my knees drawn up; I close my eyes and breathe slowly, putting my plans out of my mind. But the power of my will or consciousness stops there. As the faithful, in the Dionysian mysteries, invoke the God by miming scenes from his life, I call up the visitation of sleep by imitating the breathing and posture of the sleeper. The god is actually there when the faithful can no longer distinguish themselves from the part they are playing, when their body and their consciousness cease to bring in, as an obstacle, their particular opacity, and when they are totally fused in the myth. There is a moment when sleep ‘comes’, settling on this imitation of itself which I have been offering to it, and I succeed in becoming what I was trying to be. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 163–4)

Merleau-Ponty cannot go to sleep by deciding to do so. Sleep is not a matter of voluntary choice or decision and neither is wakefulness. Both belong to the pre-volitional aspect of subjectivity which subtends choice and decision. They are transformations of one’s state of being effected by bodily processes beyond one’s conscious awareness or control. Our bodies situate us in the waking world and the world of sleep quite independently of any decisions we might make. And yet the transition to sleep is not completely beyond Merleau-Ponty’s power. He can attempt by indirect means to act upon the pre-volitional level of his subjectivity and thereby to transform it. He can ‘call upon’ sleep as the faithful call upon Dionysus. And he can do so by way of ritual (see also Crossley, 2004). He attempts to put himself in situation by way of ritual imitation of the state of sleep. The same is true, I suggest, of the mode of intentionality required by the circuit training session. From the rituals of warming up, stretching and counting aloud, through to the performance of complex sequences and exercises, agents act out the role of the dedicated trainer in the hope and expectation of being taken over by that role. They attempt to ease themselves out of one mode of being and to throw themselves into another. Like the yogi in meditation they strive to shift their mode of connectedness to the world. And yet unlike the yogi they strive for a fast, pumped, high-energy state. Following Scarry (1987) and Leder (1990) I suggest that pain and fatigue play an important part in this process. Ordinarily, Leder argues, the body is self-effacing and ecstatic. Our sensuous being opens us

onto a world and we become too preoccupied with the world that our sensations inform us of to notice that we are having sensations. Perception is, to use the physiological term, 'exteroception'. Pain and fatigue shift the balance of the gestalt, however (see also Bendelow and Williams, 1995; Williams, 1996). They make us aware of our body and sensations. Exteroception increasingly gives way to interoception. We become more 'inwardly' focused. Our lifeworld shrinks. Although, by way of imagination, the agent may project themselves far away, spatially and temporally, their immediate sense of their world is very much reduced to a here and now as the pain occupies ever more of their experiential field. In some respects the pain or fatigue engendered through exercise is different to that described by Leder and Scarry. It is actively sought out, welcomed and controlled by the agent. The connotations of 'alienation' suggested by Leder's notion of 'dysappearance' are removed. Furthermore, as with Becker's (1963, 1967) marijuana and acid users, the agent can learn to perceive the experience more positively, to enjoy taking themselves to their physical limit, crossing the 'pain barrier' (see also Bendelow and Williams, 1995). However, as with Leder's disappearing bodies, driving the body to a particular point of pain and fatigue does tend to refocus both perception and action interoceptively, narrowing down the experiential field. It is very difficult to focus upon anything else when one's legs or arms are 'burning' and approaching exhaustion.

The intentionality of the circuit training participant is, in a very real sense, a bodily state. I do not mean by this a 'physiological state', although physiologists may well find bio-chemical correlates to the state I am describing. I mean rather a state of bodily being consisting of a narrowing and focusing of perception and motor behaviour. Furthermore, it is important to reiterate that it is an intentional modality which, as my discussion above indicated, institutes<sup>6</sup> a social and spatio-temporal structure. Even as pain shrinks the spatio-temporal horizons of the perceiving agent, that same agent, qua exercising agent, institutes the space-time of their exercise and reproduces the game.

Having said this, my observations suggest that this state is not as cut off from the 'paramount reality' of the 'outside world' as Sassatelli suggests. According to her observations the gym is a world within a world, separated symbolically from the outside by way of the changing rooms and the rituals therein. The outside has its roles and statuses, the gym has different roles and statuses:

Fitness gyms are relatively separated from everyday reality as specialised spaces ... they operate on the basis of local rules which translate, negotiate and filter ... (Sassatelli, 1999a: 229)

The changing-room helps clients to enter the spirit of training, sustaining its specificity and suspending other relevances, stripping individuals of their external identities, equalising their bodies in the moulding object of a serial and yet personalising training. (Sassatelli, 1999b: 3.2)

This was borne out to some extent in my study. However, it must be qualified. Embodied modes of intentionality are never closed. We never completely leave the waking world, even in sleep. The sleeper or dreamer, as Freud (1991) recognized, can be demonstrably affected by on-going events (bangs, changes in temperature or lighting) in the room in which they are sleeping. And they can be woken up, pulled out of sleep, by events in the waking world. This is true *a fortiori* of the mode of intentionality specific to training. Furthermore, 'external' symbols, statuses and relevances may all intrude in a way which Sassatelli does not appear to recognize. The sight of an attractive woman walking by, for example, will often suffice to distract men from their exercise and may well precipitate winks, wry smiles and 'conversations of gesture' (Mead, 1967). Workout temporarily gives way to a different form of play. In other words, interests and statuses relating to sexuality, gender and masculinity/femininity are not left in the changing rooms. In a more mundane sense participants working together will chat and discuss the events of their day or week as they go around the circuit, phasing in and out of the workout 'frame'. Sometimes they are totally fused with the exercise, at others they are more concerned to catch up with gossip or a joke. In this sense the intentional mode of the workout is more often akin to a doze than a sleep. Agents drift in and out of it. This is partially shaped by the nature of the stations or stage of the class. Exercises which render the agent upright and stationary lend themselves more easily to being combined with chatter and/or observation of the rest of the class. Exercises, such as running, which involve constant movement across the hall or which, like sit-ups, face partners at an odd angle to one another, preclude distraction. Furthermore, to reconnect with the point above, some exercises can be performed half-heartedly and relatively painlessly, allowing breathing space for other concerns, where some demand a strong degree of effort and always hurt, tending therefore to possess the agent more fully. Another crucial factor shaping the phasing in and out of 'workout frame', however, is the fact that the meaning of the class is not pre-empted by concerns with body maintenance. In addition to improving their health and appearance, participants go to meet people, 'have a laugh', relax, get out of the house or escape the pressures of work for a while, etc. Clearly those who are only concerned with these things, if they come to the gym at all, would probably only use the saunas, Jacuzzis, etc. (as some do). The fact of doing circuit training indicates some commitment to body maintenance. But this is not the only goal of the practice and, for this reason, the mode of intentionality it presupposes for its proper execution is phased with other intentions and frames.

The mode of intentionality associated with training and particularly the loosening of self-consciousness that it entails at certain points suggests interesting

parallels with Elias and Dunning's (1969) understanding of sport and excitement. While circuit training is a structured and skilful practice which demands self-discipline, it equally demands a degree of 'letting go' – albeit in a structured and contained way. Furthermore, it is clear from the discussions of some participants that this process of letting go and letting off steam is integral to the pleasure of the practice. Indeed, to return to my above point about the multiple motivations for attendance at a circuit class, the opportunity to 'let off steam' is a much-cited reason for working out amongst participants. It is important to be mindful of this. If, as some suggest, working out is a form of discipline (Lloyd, 1996; Mansfield and McGinn, 1993) it is nevertheless conducted in a context where certain of what Elias (1984) theorizes as the socially imposed demands for self-control are relaxed and a space for play and physical exertion is opened up.

Whatever the intentional drifts of agents, however, circuit training is primarily a social activity, and this demands of agents that they do the sociality demanded by it. Circuit training is not just a matter of doing exercise or even doing exercise together. Exercise is interwoven with symbolic demands and interactions. In what remains of this article I want to focus upon these symbolic factors and their significance.

### Identity and Moral Order

The lack of competence of the newcomer, their inability to pace themselves correctly, to coordinate with the class, to do certain moves and exercises and (in some cases) their lack of fitness are all potentially quite conspicuous. They make the newcomer stand out in a negative light. In this context it is quite common for more experienced members of the class to seek to repair the damage done to the newcomer's self by way of words of encouragement or (truthful) acknowledgement that everybody gets it wrong or finds it difficult at first. Experienced participants orient both to the newcomer as an identifiable 'type' (newcomer) and to the potential for embarrassment occasioned by their lack of both fitness (in every sense) and competence. And they do so by offering the newcomer an inclusive status ('newcomer-like-we-all-were-once') which excuses their deviance and affords them the time and space to acquire the competence and fitness required by the class.

However, symbolic-moral repair work is sometimes necessary for all members of the class. Mistakes and near/actual collisions, not to mention unavoidable public evidence of vulnerabilities and such usually private bodily processes as sweating, require an on-going process of negotiating and repairing both order and identities. Some participants, usually males, sweat profusely during a session,

for example. This is visible both on their body or clothing and as small pools of sweat which gather on the floor, mats and equipment. This creates a potential for embarrassment and moral injury, especially when participants change stations and (despite efforts) leave traces of sweat on mats that others must use. In such cases participants will usually seek to demonstrate to those who follow in their wake that they have made an effort to clean up behind them, thus preserving the moral integrity of both parties, and humour will commonly be employed to defuse potential embarrassment and establish a reciprocal sense that all is OK with regard to the transfer. In the case of participants who know each other well this humour may entail loud and ironic exclamations ('urgh!') or simulated horrified expressions. In the case of participants who do not know each other well, by contrast, polite and reassuring smiles or giggles are more likely.

Elias (1984) is relevant again here, since the transgressed norms of bodily decorum at issue are those emerging out of what he calls the 'civilising process' and the repair work that transgression provokes indicates observation of those norms in the breach. Circuit training is socially difficult because the activities it entails lead not only to intended breaches in civilized etiquette such as the above-mentioned 'letting go' but also, perhaps because of this, to unintended breaches whose potential effects agents seek to repair. Bodies sweat, grunt, tremble, falter and collide, and agents devise ways of incorporating these potentially disturbing events within ordered and polite interaction. More to the point, however, these breaches often shape the nature of social relationships in the class, since familiarity and physical intimacy are unavoidable. 'Civil inattention' (Goffman, 1972) and the possibilities of both self-presentation (Goffman, 1959) and the maintenance of 'distance' are very difficult, such that agents are more likely to move quickly to more relaxed forms of interaction or at least more relaxed forms of these conventions and procedures. As I note later, however, the degree of relaxation varies in accordance with levels of the familiarity and, in particular, with membership (or not) of a clique within the network structure of the class.

At a more general level, regular participants in the session have established identities connected to the class. If they are missing others will enquire within the group as to their whereabouts and so too will the teacher, sometimes aloud during the warm-up or an aerobic phase. These identities, which have a specificity (e.g. 'Nick') and a more abstract or typified form (e.g. 'a joker'), are performed within the class in a multitude of ways, and sometimes connect to specific unofficial routines which develop in the class. One regular member of the class, who recently left, for example, had the identity of 'joker'. Among other things he used to identify, with a self-ironizing and loud 'waheey', potential double entendres in the instructions given by the teacher. This became a routine

within the class to the point that others, including the teacher herself, would take his role when he wasn't there. In other words, in addition to the routines necessary to the technical reproduction of the class, a series of durable identity routines (of longer-standing members of the class) took shape.

Finally, symbolic interaction and the mirroring it entails can play an important role in the acquisition of the body techniques deployed in the circuit, either during the aerobic phases of the class or at stations. Participants use mirrors to check their posture and performance of techniques but this process is considerably enhanced by the feedback communications of others, including, but not exclusively, those of the teacher. Left to their own devices even experienced participants who are using a mirror drift into deviation from the 'proper' manner of performing a technique. They cannot adequately see their own posture and movements and as they tire they unconsciously alter their posture as a way of mobilizing fresh muscle groups to help tired muscle groups (on unconscious compensation and the holism it suggests see Goldstein, 1995). The outside view of the other is often necessary to spot this.

This mirroring role of the other can be understood on two levels. On one level it works in and through an intercorporeal relationship between agents. Agents who see another's posture in a potentially contorted position or who spot the likelihood that the other is about to trip or fall often have an empathic corporeal sense of this. They shudder. In this sense mirroring and intercorporeality are potential features of all interaction situations. On another level, however, the capacity of agents to mirror for one other within the class is based upon their acquired knowledge of working out and their 'trained eye'. In this respect their acquired practical understanding of circuit training, their habitus, shapes not only their own actions but those of others too.

Mirroring is an important process which the theory of embodied agency that I have drawn heavily upon in this article, that of Merleau-Ponty, tends to overlook (although see Merleau-Ponty [1964] on 'the mirror stage'). Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1965) is intrigued by the process of learning by imitation and the questions it throws up. When a child learns to speak, he notes, it must use parts of its body which it cannot see (e.g. its larynx), to copy actions of others whose relevant body parts it cannot see either (e.g. the movement of their larynx). This presupposes, contra Lacan (1989) and post-structuralists who believe the body to be chaotic before it is disciplined, a considerable degree of corporeal self-possession. Imitation is an intelligent and skilled rather than a 'dopey' activity (see Crossley, 1996a, 2002). It also suggests, however, that what is imitated is not a mechanical movement but rather a goal orientation, the meaning or gist of an action. The child doesn't copy an action (because it can't perceive the action as

such) but rather copies what the action does or means. This also suggests that, even prior to the acquisition of language, the relationship of the child to its others is mutually meaningful. It is intersubjective or intercorporeal (see Crossley, 1996a; Trevarthen, 1977, 1979; Trevarthen and Hubley, 1978). What Merleau-Ponty fails to capture, however, is the sense in which the child's other reflects back indications of success to the child, entering into a dialogue which will ultimately 'correct' early attempts at imitation and impose a more culturally acceptable form upon it. His post-Cartesian philosophy necessitates this, as he quite clearly believes that much of what human beings know about themselves they know by way of the feedback they receive from others but he doesn't take the necessary step. A reflection upon learning in circuit training clearly reveals the necessity for this. As Merleau-Ponty's account would predict, participants copy the meaning or gist of what they see rather than the mechanical movements involved. However, perhaps partly for this reason their copies are imperfect. And because they cannot see this, because they do not see themselves (the use of literal mirrors notwithstanding), symbolic mediation becomes necessary. Body techniques are shaped through symbolic interaction.

This is important in relation to circuit training but it also has a more general relevance in relation to body techniques. The inability of embodied agents to see large sections of their bodies when they are using those parts necessitates relationships of mirroring and symbolic interaction for the proper learning of body techniques. Furthermore, the learning and practice of even relatively 'technical' body techniques takes place within a normative context to which interested parties orient. There is, within any group, a 'right' way of performing given body techniques. And members of that group are expected to perform any technique in accordance with its norm.

Do these relations of mirroring and normative judgements extend to the shape and fitness of bodies? They do between agents who know each other relatively well (see my notes on the clique below). Much of the talk between friends in the class concerns issues of who is looking fit or fat, who is working hard or 'slacking'. And this is generally communicated to the person in question, albeit in a humorous fashion. Furthermore, proleptically anticipating the possibility that they too are being judged in this way, participants will offer comments on their own physique, fitness and performance, sometimes excusing a poor effort (e.g. 'heavy weekend') and generally deferring to the implicit norm, again in a humorous fashion, that one is there to keep trim and fit. An individual who has put on weight, for example, may describe themselves as such (e.g. 'lardy'), indicating their recognition that they need to do something about this. Having said this, it would be quite wrong to suggest that this concern pre-empts interaction

in the class. As noted above, talk ranges over many issues. Furthermore, at least some of the symbolic negotiation in the class centres upon the need to be 'cool' about working out, not taking things too seriously and not being seen to fall foul of negative stereotypes of the 'gym freak' or 'gym bore'. Such 'feedback' serves to regulate involvement at the gym at a 'not too much, not too little' level, as that is determined by the group.

Many other examples of the role of symbolic interaction could be given. The important point to emphasize here, however, is that these interactional features are inseparable from the business of exercise. If individuals are to exercise together then the use of basic interactional resources and the emergence of a local symbolic culture connected to that collectivity is both necessary and inevitable. Furthermore, this culture feeds into the exercise process itself, as it becomes a source of encouragement (or perhaps discouragement), incentives, competition, information, reference and mirroring, etc. The culture of interaction becomes wrapped around and intertwined with the more instrumental pursuit of exercising. The 'game' of circuit training is thus never reducible to the technicalities of exercise. We can expand this point by considering the network structure which, in turn, shapes the symbolic interactions of the class.

### Local Identities and Network Structure

The symbolic interaction that makes up the class is not exclusively between strangers but also between named and known others; others who may have been working out together over a period of years, who have regularly socialized with each other outside the class, who have shared many experiences, who have supported and helped each other outside the class in a multitude of ways, and who have come to know a lot about each other. Over the years a pattern has developed among certain members of the class (along with some other gym-goers) for, first, meeting up in the saunas and steam rooms after the class for a chat and, second, having regular 'curry nights' to mark both public (e.g. Christmas) and private (e.g. birthdays) events. From this, a variety of types of exchanges have emerged. In my own case, for example: I have been on a cycling weekend with some of the participants; I have been to see bands and exchanged CDs with another; one (who is an architect) looked over a house that my wife and I were considering purchasing; one is a joiner who has done (paid) work for us; several have been over to our house for a meal/drink; several distributed questionnaires among work colleagues for me, etc. In other words, through the common participation of a group of agents in a circuit training class a durable social network has emerged whose significance extends beyond the circuit training class itself.

It is quite common for newcomers to be invited to join ‘the group’ (sauna sessions and curry nights both serving as a rite of passage), and as a group its membership has changed quite considerably over the period of years that I have been involved in it. Some people have dropped out, others have joined in. Fluidity of boundaries has been the rule. However, at any one point in time a clique exists within the class in virtue of these ‘extra-curricular’ activities and this clique is important to the structure of the class. Members of the clique do not simply ‘do’ the circuit, they simultaneously ‘do’ membership of the clique or at least ‘do’ their relationships to other members of the clique, and the doing of one affects the doing of the other.

The existence and size of this group are clearly illustrated in Figure 1, which shows the result of a (network) cluster analysis of the participation of members of the circuit class in a variety of events. Cluster one, consisting of eight people, is the clique I am referring to. Cluster two is a larger grouping of individuals who participated at least once in one of the two weekly circuit classes over a four-week period but did not engage in the extra-curricular activities of the clique.

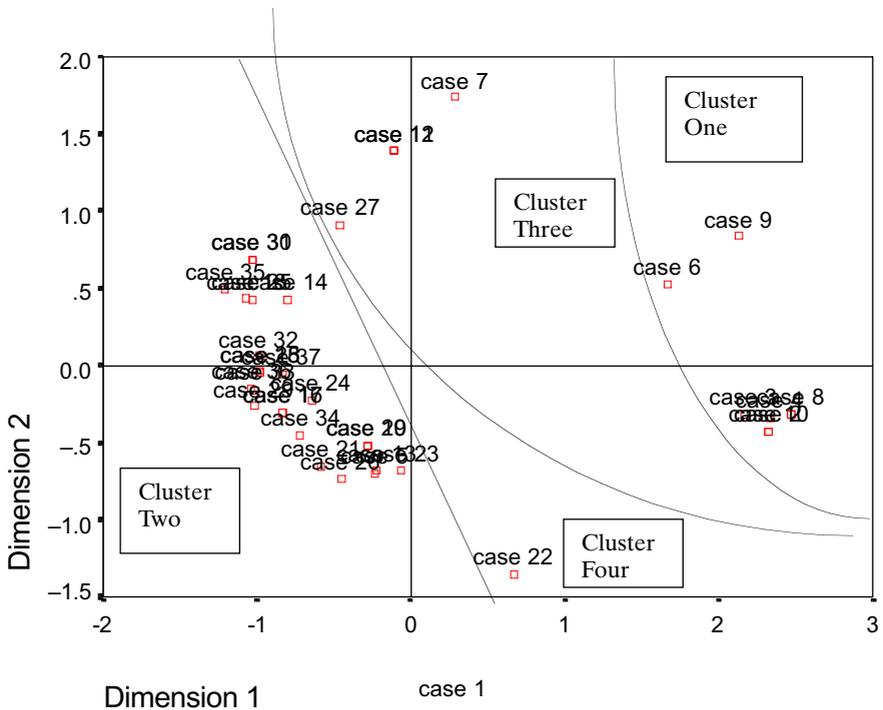


Figure 1 Network Model of Circuit Class

Clusters three and four are intermediate groupings of individuals on the fringe of the clique. The methodology underlying this network map is explained in the footnotes.<sup>7</sup> Here, having noted and mapped the existence of the clique, I want to focus on three significant effects which its existence has upon the interactions which constitute the circuit class.

First, the mutual familiarity of members of the clique changes the nature of the required rules of decorum which hold between them. Rules of 'civil inattention' (Goffman, 1972) which apply to strangers in the class do not apply, for example, and inattention might even be deemed rude. Similarly with rules about personal space. Clique members might grab each other, slap each other, deliberately bump into each other or otherwise interfere with each other in the course of the class. This, in turn, is significant to the successful completion of the class as these various norms of sociability, and more particularly the licence for action and improvisation they afford, are necessary resources for the doing of the class. The clique do the class differently. Their existence as a clique facilitates and even calls for an alternative organization of activity within the class to that which holds between less well acquainted participants. Body techniques are adapted not just to the exigencies of interaction but to the exigencies of interaction between strangers in some cases and close friends in other cases.

Second, the existence of the clique affects the 'power ratio' within the class (to use Elias's [1978] concept). I noted earlier, for example, that certain members of the class, we can now say members of cluster one, will occasionally subvert the order of the class (e.g. clapping out of time). Furthermore, when the teacher is lax with respect to timekeeping they may assume her role, repairing the temporal order of the class while subverting its official hierarchy. They are able to do so because they are known and recognized by the class or at least by their clique. They are able to trust that their actions will be read and responded to favourably. Agents outside the clique cannot (and do not) take the same liberties because they lack the backing of a group. It is also significant in this case that the teacher of the class has been in place for many years and has come on many of the 'curry nights' over the years. She is part of the group. Group dynamics are very different when substitute teachers are used, particularly if those substitute teachers are personally unknown to the class (and particularly to the clique who would otherwise presume to know the teacher personally). Indeed, such cases sometimes provoke tensions and certainly provoke comment as the clique, though still existing as a group within the class, lacks the 'member' (i.e. the teacher) whose membership is the key to their greater power within the group. The power of the clique is important, from our point of view, because it tends to steer or drive the class in particular directions and, to this extent, is a crucial aspect of the practice itself.

Finally, the class can tend to become divided between the clique, with its differential power and different norms of sociability, and those (perhaps only temporarily) outside of it. The experience of strangeness for newcomers, as they sometimes later articulate, stems as much from estrangement from the group as from lack of competence at the moves involved in the class, a factor which stems from the fact that the class involves a personal social network and not merely a mass of (mutual) strangers. This can be quite alienating and off-putting for some participants, who feel excluded from the class because they are excluded from the network – which is itself, to reiterate, visible in the way in which its members interact and ‘do’ the circuit. At the same time, however, it contributes to the motivation of its participants insofar as it generates a range of further social rewards for participating, such as friendship.

Like habitus, agency and practice, network and interaction interlock in a mutually reinforcing way. Networks are generated by way of interaction and the bonds it gives rise to, but at the same time the existence of these bonds affects and changes the nature of interaction. It shifts from a between-strangers mode to a between-intimates mode. More to the point, habitus, agency, practice, interaction and network each interact in a mutually reinforcing fashion. The dialectic of habitus and body-subject (which is constitutive of agency) must engage with the exigencies of interaction (which are structured by networks which, in turn, they structure) in order to produce practices which are incorporated in the habitus by the body-subject and so on, in an on-going process. In addition, there is a link between network and habitus because the bonds comprising the network are, in effect, ‘sediments’ of prior interactions which take shape as habitus in the form of *connaissance*,<sup>8</sup> trust, background knowledge and expectancies, etc. Furthermore, there is a link between interaction and habitus, both because interactions sediment qua bonds within the habitus and because interaction presupposes the acquired social competence rooted in the habitus. Finally, to reiterate the key point of this section, the existence of a clique within the network structure of the class affects the way in which interaction and thus the practice of the class itself is done. The doing of the circuit class is a collective process and as such is shaped by the pattern of bonds holding between its members and the various effects, noted above, of that pattern of bonds.

## Conclusions

It may be convenient short-hand to refer to circuit training, as many social and cultural researchers do, as a ‘practice’ which ‘invests’ the body. Certainly circuit

training modifies the body. It tones and builds muscle, burns off fat and calories, stretches muscles and tendons, keeping the body supple. It improves cardiovascular functioning, improves coordination and corporeal self-mastery, etc. We must be wary, however, not to let talk of 'practices' 'investing' the body lead us to reify what is, in fact, a reflexive and collaborative activity of embodied agents. Circuit training as a social practice is 'done' by the self-same embodied agents to whom it is done and their doing of it is a skilful accomplishment which presupposes a considerable degree of acquired embodied know-how. In this article I have attempted to explore this process through an ethnographic analysis. In the first sections of the article I focused on certain of the technical aspects of circuit training, showing that – and how – this practice presupposes a range of acquired abilities which lend it structure. I described circuit training as a language game which must be learned and I reflected upon the practical constitution of the time and space of the class as they are constituted through the activities of its participants. Moreover, I reflected upon the specific mode of embodied intentionality which participation involves, arguing that agents must be able to tune into the class. These technicalities are only one side of the story, however. In the later sections of the article, building on comments from the earlier sections, I began to explore the nexus of symbolic interactions which are wrapped around these more technical accomplishments in a mutually affecting way, and I considered the more durable aspects of the network structure (in particular the existence of a clique) which, in turn, both takes shape within and shapes this interaction.

While it is possible for analytic purposes to isolate 'circuit training' in pure form as a social practice this is not how it is done 'in practice'. Agents in a circuit training class do not simply exercise. Because they work out collectively they must coordinate and organize their exercising so as to regulate the mutual interference which their co-habitation of space necessarily engenders. And this need for coordination is overlaid with the norms of civilized interaction. The moral rules of wider society, or at least some of them, still apply in the gym and participants in a class therefore shape their technical performance of exercise in accordance with these demands. Agents skipping must 'body gloss' to let runners pass. Press-ups must be combined with self-work, etc. Finally, this activity, repeated week in and week out, generates identities, bonds and networks which affect the dynamics and thus the doing of the class. The presence of a network with identities embedded in it alters the context, permitting and perhaps even requiring further deviation from a mechanical repetition of 'exercises'. Agents combine the doing of exercise with the doing of friendship and the doing of moral order. Compared to models for working out which one finds in the expert literature this is no doubt something of a 'witches' brew' but it is far from being disordered

and should not be understood simply in terms of deviation from an ideal. It is a fluid and complex interaction order.

## Notes

1. G.H. Mead's (1967) distinction between I and Me is particularly useful in thinking about reflexive bodily projects. See also Crossley (2001a).

2. If we want to keep the sense that body techniques are forms of understanding, 'embodied principles', rather than mechanical sets of movement, then it is important, as discussions of understanding by both Ryle (1949) and Wittgenstein (1953) indicate (see also Crossley, 2001a), that we preserve a sense of the flexibility and competence attaching to body techniques. Mauss's account sometimes emphasizes rigidity and constraint to such a point that this sense is threatened.

3. As I have noted elsewhere (Crossley, 2001b), only Husserl actually uses the term 'habitus'. Merleau-Ponty (1962), by contrast, uses the term 'habit' and Schutz (1964) uses a range of terms. Both of the latter two follow Husserl's analysis of the habitus closely in their work, however.

4. I say 'largely involuntary' because, as Husserl (1970) notes, agents can attempt, relatively self-consciously, to harbour this involuntary bodily tendency for their own purposes: e.g. they can 'train' themselves to do things (see also Crossley, 2001a, 2001b).

5. Participants may, for example, be required to hop the length of the gym, or skip or scoot.

6. Here I follow Merleau-Ponty in replacing the phenomenological notion of 'constitution' with 'institution'. In essence this entails that the subject bestows sense upon the world by way of habits that it has built up, including, importantly, shared habits of its culture which it has acquired through a process of socialization.

7. Following Scott (1991), we can represent network structure using a combination of (non-metric) multi-dimensional scaling (MDS) and cluster analysis (on network analysis see also Degenne and Forsé, 1999). To derive this diagram each individual who attended one class during a prescribed four-week period was included in an incidence matrix recording their participation (or not) in each of the eight classes during that period, each of the eight 'sauna sessions' following the classes and, in addition, the last four 'curry nights'. Participants were then scaled and plotted on a graph, using MDS, and a cluster analysis was performed, whose results are mapped over the MDS display. A four-cluster solution to the cluster analysis seemed the best fit and readily mapped on to the MDS plot. Cluster one, which represents most members of the clique I am referring to, comprises 8 of the 37 agents included in the analysis. Cluster two, which contains 24 agents, contains those most removed from the clique. Clusters three and four, which contain 4 and 1 agents respectively, contain agents who are closer to the clique but perhaps not fully, by my methodological definition, part of it.

The network analysis is problematic on a number of counts. First, although my ethnographic analysis suggests that there are no similar large groupings to compare with cluster one, the analysis is conducted from the point of view of cluster one. It does not account for ties amongst cluster two members, for example, which may be significant to them: e.g. pairs of friends who come and work out together. Second, as I have conducted it, it obscures ties and bonds between all members of the class which are not expressed by way of participation in particular events (i.e. sauna sessions and curry nights). Although a class will generally contain some number of newcomers, 'strangers' and longer-standing participants who keep themselves to themselves, nevertheless there are many first-name friendships within the class which transcend cluster membership. Third, the network analysis underestimates the relative size of the clique cluster, as it includes (in cluster two) participants who may only have attended one or two sessions out of a possible eight. On any given night the clique might constitute 8 out of 20–25 participants, but never the 37 recorded in the analysis. Notwithstanding these problems, however, the network analysis is useful for indicating and visualizing the existence of the

clique, the significance of which should not be underestimated when we are analysing the overall structure of the session.

8. I use the French term '*connaissance*' here because it captures concisely the sense of practical familiarity that holds between agents who know one another.

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