JÜRGEN MARTSCHUKAT

THE AGE OF FITNESS

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THE AGE OF FITNESS

HOW THE BODY CAME TO SYMBOLIZE SUCCESS AND ACHIEVEMENT

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TRANSLATED BY ALEX SKINNER

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INTRODUCTION: THE AGE OF FITNESS

We live in the age of fitness. Tens of thousands of people run marathons and compete in all-comers cycle races, while millions go for an evening jog in the park or work out in gyms, where they lift weights and use machines of various kinds or practice yoga; active vacations of all kinds are more popular than ever. In 1970, this was barely conceivable. Hiking vacations were for retirees and windsurfing had just been invented. The Berlin Marathon still lay in the future. Few adults had a bicycle, while gyms were few and far between. Since then, however, fitness has boomed. Let's consider the scale of the fitness market. In Germany alone, active people (and those who want to appear active, or at least aspire to be active) spent over 50 billion euros on fitness-related items in 2015: running shoes and sportswear, weights and carbon fiber bicycles, energy drinks and diet foods. Equally popular are fitness classes and activity vacations, fitness magazines and books, apps and gadgets. Fitness stars such as Kayla Itsines – to mention one of many examples – have millions of followers on Instagram; images of toned bodies are hugely popular on social media.[1]

What those engaged in "getting fit" generally have in common is that they are active, but rarely organize themselves in clubs or associations. They do not participate in a specific league, and they are almost never out to win a competition. Yet they all want to improve themselves somehow. They do not engage in the kind of organized competitive sport that spread from the United Kingdom to other modernizing societies from the mid-nineteenth century.[2] Those who undertake fitness training are not looking to win a medal. Instead, what this practice aims to

achieve is a fit body. This body, in turn, stands for an array of partially overlapping forces, abilities and ideals, which point far beyond the doing of sport. These encompass one's health and performance in everyday life and at work, productivity and the ability to cope with challenging situations, potency, a slim figure and a pleasing appearance according to the prevalent standards of beauty. Also important in this context is "doing the right thing," "doing something good" for oneself, and getting the "best" out of oneself, as well as gaining recognition for it. At times, the sheer joy of movement and activity also comes into play. These various driving forces are not mutually exclusive.

The pursuit of fitness[3] is part of a culture and society that concurrently laments increasingly fat bodies. In the twenty-first century, fatness is even referred to as an epidemic, and health problems such as type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease are a perennial topic of concern. Particularly in Western societies, but now also worldwide, the consistent message is that the lack of physical activity has assumed "frightening proportions."[4] A so-called sedentary lifestyle and an unhealthy, high-calorie diet are viewed as the main causes of increasing fatness. On the one hand, then, there is a culture of fitness, while on the other there is anxiety over the lack of exercise and burgeoning fatness. What may seem contradictory at first sight turns out to be part of a single social formation, centered on the self-responsible, committed and productive individual. Both sides of this coin (the culture of fitness and the fear of fat) revolve around the successful self, which proves its success by mastering its own body. In (post)modern societies, lack of fitness amounts to a flashing red light.

To gain a deep understanding of our age of fitness, this book delves into history. To illuminate the present through the past means comprehending history as a space "in which

the present has been formed."[5] We have to draw on history if we aspire to grasp our own present, identify its problems and paradigms, and engage critically in its most contentious debates.

This entails linking the topic of fitness with the project of the free, self-responsible individual and their history. As this book reveals, historicizing fitness demonstrates that lived self-responsibility and its consolidation as an ideal have constituted a project for more than two centuries. Writing a history of fitness also means exploring the genealogy of competition and performance, and assessing their importance to modern societies, to their organization and to the societal participation of different types of person. Another key question concerns body shape and health and the relationship between the two. Above all, though, a history of fitness is a history of the body as social history: a history of values and norms, epistemic and discursive orders, representations and figurations, technologies and bodily practices. A history of the body of this kind shows how people are placed in a particular relationship to society through their bodies and how they participate in their own emplacement.[6]

My observations focus on recent history, since the 1970s. The last half-century may be considered the age of fitness, and it is no accident that this coincides with the age of neoliberalism. Rather than a generalizing call to arms, here neoliberalism denotes an epoch that has modeled itself on the market, interprets every situation as a competitive struggle and enjoins people to make productive use of their freedom. Neoliberalism thus describes a certain way of thinking about society and subjects, understanding their behavior and classifying it as appropriate or inappropriate. The individual is supposed to work on themself, have life under control, get fit, ensure their own productive capacity and embody these things in the truest sense of the word.

This requirement has achieved unprecedented importance under neoliberalism.[7] Fitness is everywhere. Fitness, as philosopher Michel Foucault might have put it, is a "*dispositif*" or apparatus – an era-defining network of discourses and practices, institutions and things, buildings and infrastructure, administrative measures, political programs, and much more besides.[8]

But I also reach further back into history in order to understand our age of fitness. At times the tracks we need to follow extend back to the eighteenth century, for example when it comes to the idea of liberty and self-determination, or the disciplining of the soldierly body. Yet it was not just the soldier but also the new republican citizen that was required to be disciplined and upright, rather than glutted, degenerate, and physically torpid like the nobility, or stooped and battered like the third estate.[9] In a history of fitness, the middle of the nineteenth century also demands our attention. This is the period when Darwinism, the "survival of the fittest," and the conception of inevitable, natural competition took the stage. And it was in the decades around 1900 that modern societies first experienced a fitness hype. At the same time, they were plagued by a crisis that was experienced, in part, as a crisis of the body. When it comes to the history of fitness over the last few decades, in many ways the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries presaged future trends more than the cult of the body in fascism and Nazism. Historians have often highlighted the 1950s and 1960s in this regard as well. After years of crisis and war, many people on both sides of the Atlantic once again indulged in the pleasures of consumption. Yet this immediately led to anxieties about its harmful effects on the body, health and performance.

The history of fitness related in this book is a critical one. This means that it pays attention to the ambivalences of

fitness. It brings out how societies are governed through fitness – understood as the freedom to work on the body and the successful self. This means doing more than just admiring fitness and more than praising freedom as a fundamental human right and opportunity. In fact, freedom is bound up with the demand, made of all of us, to use our freedom productively and in the best possible way; and fitness perfectly embodies this facet of freedom. People's success or failure in this respect establishes differences, engenders exclusion and legitimizes privileges.[10] The coexistence of, and simultaneous antagonism between, fitness and fatness, their meanings and associations, reveal the manifold tensions inherent in governing through freedom and fitness. Fitness and fatness – often perceived as non-fitness – have a significant impact on whether a person is recognized as a productive member of society, on who may be considered a subject and who may not.[11]

In the course of this book, I will routinely locate fitness in "modernity," describing fitness as its hallmark and regulatory ideal. Modern societies have declared perpetual optimization and renewal one of their core precepts and achievements, and fitness posits the constant optimization of body and self. In line with this, as they have developed over time, modernity and fitness have been closely interlinked. The origins of both lie in the late eighteenth century and both experienced a boom in the decades around 1900. Toward the end of the twentieth century, meanwhile, both modernity and fitness began to change or come to a head in key respects. This applies, for example, to the paradigm of the body's malleability. In postmodernity, working on one's body has even gained in importance and, as sociologist Paula-Irene Villa writes, "Bodywork is always and inevitably work on the social self."[12]

Similar may be said of my references to the “West” as the main setting for the following history of fitness. What I have in mind here is a critical perspective on a community of values, norms, and principles, which include the productive use of freedom, the optimization of the self, and constant progress.[13] Hence, the following chapters focus on the US and Europe, especially Germany, and on the similarities and differences that typify the relationship between freedom, bodies, and social order on each side of the Atlantic. The US is in fact the society most dedicated to the idea of freedom as norm and practice.

Fitness, then, operates via the body, but it is by no means limited to it. So, this book is about much more than “just” the training of the body. The first chapter foregrounds our present and recent past, bringing out the significance of the body and body shape. My focus is on those practices and policies that are directly related to the body and that are obsessively pursued in our contemporary societies. The key terms here are exercise and eating right. Chapter 2 sketches the history of the fitness concept, from the eighteenth century to the 1970s. It shows how the idea of dynamism and the notion that we can achieve anything we aspire to have increasingly permeated modern societies, and it reveals how the notion of fitness, as we know it today, emerged. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 go even further beyond fitness as bodily practice. They scrutinize three fields of tremendous importance to the individual’s recognition as a productive member of society and as a subject. Chapter 3 deals with the relationship between fitness and work, and thus revolves around the importance of bodies and productivity. Turning to the relationship between fitness and sex, chapter 4 considers reproductivity and potency. The fifth chapter discusses the relationship between fitness and the ready ability to deal with challenges and achieve our goals through sustained effort,

probing how fitness and heroic visions intermesh. For a long time, these visions were of a martial cast. For some time, however, and increasingly, they have been taking inspiration from the struggles of everyday life.

Each chapter in this book forms a coherent whole and may be read individually. But only reading the entire book will convey how deeply fitness is inscribed in modern societies, and how critical fitness is to success or failure, recognition or exclusion, in a society that sets such great store by self-responsibility, performance, market, and competition.

Notes

1. On “sport as an economic factor,” see *Informationen aus dem Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft* #12/2018, June 7, 2018, https://www.iwd.de/archiv/2018/; see also the Instagram account of Kayla Itsines, https://www.instagram.com/kayla_itsines/?hl=en.

2. Gruneau, *Sport & Modernity*; Eisenberg, *“English Sports” und deutsche Bürger*; Eisenberg, “Die Entdeckung des Sports.”

3. In using the phrase “pursuit of fitness,” I borrow from the American Declaration of Independence, which refers to the “pursuit of happiness”; see esp. chapter 2 and Martschukat, “The Pursuit of Fitness.”

4. See, for example, Werner Bartens, “Krankhaft sesshaft. Der Bewegungsmangel hat weltweit erschreckende Ausmaße angenommen,” *SZ*, September 6, 2018, 14; on Germany, see Froböse et al., *Der DKV-Report 2018*; Guthold et al., “Worldwide Trends in Insufficient Physical Activity.”

5. Editorial, *Geschichte der Gegenwart*.

6. See esp. Netzwerk Körper (ed.), *What Can a Body Do?* See also many of the articles in *Body Politics: Zeitschrift für Körpergeschichte*, http://bodypolitics.de/de/uber-die-zeitschrift/; Lorenz, *Leibhaftige Vergangenheit*, was pioneering in its day.

7. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 15–50; Rödder, *21.0*, 54–5. In those parts of the book where I write about fitness, the economy, and the world of work, I also use the term "flexible capitalism" to refer to the last 50 years because it more accurately captures the specific historical shifts and challenges involved; Lessenich, *Die Neuerfindung des Sozialen*, 9–19.

8. Foucault, "Confessions of the Flesh"; Ganahl, "Ist Foucaults dispositif ein Akteur-Netzwerk?"; van Dyk, "Was die Welt zusammenhält."

9. Alkemeyer, *Zeichen, Körper und Bewegung*, 212; Mayer, *Wissenschaft vom Gehen*.

10. Krasmann, "Regieren über Freiheit"; Rose, *Powers of Freedom*.

11. Honneth, *Anerkennung*, 182–234; Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*.

12. Gumbrecht, "Modern, Modernität, Moderne"; Dipper, "Moderne, Version: 2.0"; Gruneau, *Sport & Modernity*, 1–14; Villa, "Einleitung – Wider die Rede vom Äußerlichen," 8.

13. Hall, "The West and the Rest."

1
“FIT OR FAT”? FITNESS IN RECENT HISTORY AND THE PRESENT DAY

Cycling and self-tracking

Anyone who practices cycling – whether the average Joe on their Sunday morning bike ride or a pro ascending the Alpe d’Huez – almost certainly has a little computer on their handlebars. This measures speed, distance traveled and altitude attained, but also, depending on the device, one’s pulse rate, cadence, and power output in watts. The number of calories (supposedly) burned is also shown. The goal is obvious: the bike computer is an aid to self-observation. It is intended to provide information about the cyclist’s performance level and help optimize their activity, perfect their body, and enhance their potential. The symbiosis of body and technology, fundamental to cycling in any case, has reached a new level.[1]

As far as the targeted improvement of one’s performance is concerned, however, such a device has a shortcoming. It registers very precisely what is happening on the bike (only the physical performance, of course, not the joy of movement, let alone the pleasure derived from the landscape). But it records nothing of one’s life outside exercise. The device is unaware of how much exercise I get overall, how much beer I drink, whether I eat a lot of fatty meat and potato chips, and whether I get enough quality sleep. To observe and evaluate these things requires a

different technology. If a smartphone is equipped with a corresponding app and supplemented by some gadgets, then one's behavior can be tracked, measured, and evaluated 24 hours a day. This is known as fitness tracking or self-tracking. One can also use a smartwatch or a fitness wristband to do this. Measuring and recording one's actions thus permeates everyday life, even when one is fast asleep – and all in the name of performance.

In Germany, about a third of the population is said to record data on movement, eating, sleeping, and bodily trends in one way or another. In the United States the figure is claimed to be almost 70 percent, though the numbers vary widely, depending on who one asks and what, exactly, one is talking about.[2] In 2007, the Quantified Self (QS) movement was launched in the San Francisco Bay Area, and it has now spread throughout the Western world. Its adherents not only measure their bodily, behavioral, and environmental parameters. They also submit to psychological tests, genome sequencing and much more besides. The goal, as stated on the website of the German QS-Community, is to "reflect upon ourselves and understand what allows us to make better, more informed decisions."[3] Many self-trackers share their knowledge and data on the Internet with a community of like-minded people who are both their associates and competitors. Health insurance providers on both sides of the Atlantic are now offering discounts to those willing to practice self-tracking and fitness tracking or to submit the data generated. They have developed relevant apps or provide the necessary technology. According to the insurance companies, this makes it possible to identify the risk of illness earlier and more effectively.[4]

This raises sensitive social and political issues concerning electronic patient records and "big data" in the healthcare

system. But my concern here is with a quite different matter, namely self-tracking as a paradigmatic practice of a culture and society that revolves around free individuals, competition, market, and performance as its essential principles. The QS movement itself underscores that its activities are oriented toward “every sphere of life.” Hence, its concept of fitness goes far beyond sports and physical workouts as such. Certainly, in the first instance self-trackers are out to determine their relationship with their own bodies. Yet at the same time, their actions and the data generated make it possible to establish relationships between the body, the individual, their society, and the environment in which they live. In a society based on its members’ autonomy and efficiency, self-tracking can even be considered a practice of engaged citizenship. Citizenship, then, is more than a legal concept. It encompasses the question of who is recognized as a productive member of society, why, and who may make certain claims on this basis. If working on your own fitness is a key criterion for this recognition, then the cyclist of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is the prototype of the good citizen.[5]

Health, fitness, and fatness in neoliberal times

Fitness, then, is more than just the prerequisite for success in sport. In the twenty-first century, a broad consensus exists on this point, regardless of whether we ask health authorities, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, or kinesiologist Karen Volkwein.[6] Volkwein, for example, defines fitness as “health stabilized through training.”[7] At first sight, this definition may appear clear and simple. Upon closer inspection, however, it reveals the tremendous scope and complexity as well as the multiple

implications of fitness. First, and quite obviously, fitness is closely bound up with health, and in the recent history of Western societies health means more than the absence of infirmity or disease. Health, as the World Health Organization (WHO) already stated upon its establishment in 1948, is a state of physical, mental, and social wellbeing. This implies that the healthy individual has the means and capacity to meet challenges and live a good, productive life. It also makes health a symbol of success and a precondition for recognition. Second, Volkwein's definition of fitness indicates that health may be stabilized through training or neglected and thrown out of kilter by its absence. This makes health and quality of life – not entirely but to a considerable extent – the individual's own responsibility. They must actively manage themself and their life, taking the appropriate preventive measures. Practices of prevention, in fact, amount to a "crucial cultural technology of modernity." Since the 1950s, "prevention" has become a key principle in medicine and society, one that, according to sociologist Ulrich Bröckling, requires the individual to act "as an autonomous and competent agent vis-à-vis their own life."[8] Third, while health may be stabilized through training, it can never be entirely stable. So, health can never be achieved, at least not definitively. Health is a point that can never be reached, and the older one gets, the further one moves away from it. Those who stop exercising and working on their own fitness are neglecting their health. Health is fleeting. It requires permanent work on oneself and signifies constant action. The logic of fitness is very powerful, even though we all know that illnesses can occur despite constant self-care.[9]

Hence, health is a highly normative concept, one that molds our notions of a good and a bad lifestyle.[10] This is even more true of fitness, as it functions explicitly as a hinge between lifestyle and health. Companies like

Jawbone and Microsoft enjoin potential buyers of their fitness bracelets to “Know Yourself. Live Better,” and even to “be a better human” (see figure 1). These promptings also come across as promises.[11] Fitness is a regulatory and normative ideal of liberal, modern societies. It not only describes how you are, but what you ought to be – and how you can become what you ought to be.[12]

What we have to do, then, is interrogate how fitness operates, while laying bare the processes of inclusion and exclusion it facilitates.[13] Who is considered fit, and who is not? What happens when some are considered fit and others are not? People are governed by fitness, and this is especially true of liberal societies, which are particularly vociferous in demanding citizens’ voluntary engagement.[14] For the autonomous and self-responsible individual is central to liberal societies. And self-responsibility means ensuring one’s commitment and efficiency in every sphere of life. Those who manage themselves demonstrate their ability to take responsibility for society. Anyone wishing to be viewed as a successful individual and good member of society must be productive, reproductive, and ready to tackle challenges. One has to be hardworking, attractive, and strong. Here fitness plays a regulatory and normative role, though not necessarily through external enforcement in the form of prescription and punishment. Fitness creates zones of marginality and exclusion. This is its regulatory and normative effect. Those who fail to conform to the ideal at play here, who are considered ill or physically impaired, or who are, apparently, neglecting to work on themselves enough to become and stay fit, are marginalized or excluded. The power of fitness, the nature of its requirements, and the emphasis placed on them, have varied over the course of history.[15]

Figure 1 Advertisement for the Microsoft Smartwatch, 2014

Few things more clearly bring out the power of fitness, its linkage with physicality, and the political dimension of this entire complex than the collective fear of body fat. In recent decades, the fear of fat has taken hold of Western societies more than ever before. At first glance, fitness and fatness seem to be polar opposites, yet they are mutually constitutive. Together, they bring order to a culture and society that privileges the efficient, self-directed individual. For the members of such a society, it is obviously unsettling to hear and read every week, from one source or another, that, for example, “Germany is getting fat,” that Germans are less and less active and are becoming “fatter and fatter.”[16] There is always a handy scientific study to quote from when the press or the political sphere declares that around half of all Germans are overweight and about one-

fifth obese. More than twothirds of Americans are said to be overweight and almost 40 percent obese, especially in rural areas. Depending on state and demographic group, the obesity rate rises to 55 percent, the key elements being social status, level of poverty and, interwoven with these factors, race and gender. In other words, poor black women in Mississippi are among the fattest of the fat. The particularly fat are considered to have failed to meet the demands of a liberal society. Moreover, fatness is viewed as pathological. It is therefore referred to, using medical terminology, as obesity. Since the late twentieth century, fatness has even been called an epidemic. It is not spread by a virus, but has infected large numbers of people due to certain living conditions and circumstances. The US government officially adopted this medical terminology in 2001 and literally declared war on obesity the same year. The WHO, meanwhile, has for some time been referring to “globesity” to highlight the increasingly global scale of this phenomenon.[17]

I do not intend (and am not qualified) to evaluate the health effects of too much or too little body fat here. The various statements made on this topic are, in any case, highly controversial, while for years the seemingly straightforward relationship between body fat and health has become increasingly contested. For example, the Body Mass Index (BMI) has ceased to be a widely recognized indicator of body fat. Many commentators doubt that the BMI is an effective predictor of disorders and mortality rates. Recent studies have in fact shown that at least a certain amount of body fat is beneficial to one’s health. What is more, some research findings are more likely to be published and receive more attention than others, and those who do not subscribe to the prevalent fatphobia seem to experience a certain publication bias.[18] The social demonization of fatness continues virtually unabated. Here

the deceptive power of the visible seems to be at work. People feel they can see with their own eyes that fat cannot possibly be a good thing, but makes one sluggish and immobile.[19]

My concern here is not with what is truly healthy or unhealthy, but with the power and persistence of the discourse on fatness and fitness and its social effects. The discourse on fatness is deeply political in many ways. First there is the classic political level. In 2007, the German government adopted the “Fit Not Fat Action Plan,” and launched a campaign known as “IN FORM. Germany’s Initiative for Healthy Eating and More Exercise” in 2008. Initiatives of this kind have been instigated since the 1970s. Fit Not Fat and IN FORM are intended to embed the “healthy lifestyle as a social value” by 2020, improve Germans’ eating habits and increase their physical activity. But it is not laws or punishment that are to pave the way for these changes. Instead, the goal is to appropriately shape the overall framework within which people make decisions and take action, providing them with all sorts of incentives. Government agencies and representatives should be good role models, provide knowledge and information, and motivate people to eat better and exercise more. Germans can continue to decide freely whether to eat fries or salad, whether to stay at home and be couch potatoes or go for a bike ride. But the decision-making architecture should be arranged in such a way as to facilitate a healthy choice. This kind of politics is called “nudging,” a form of governance that seeks to prod or steer citizens to make voluntary decisions that are viewed as “better” and “healthier.” Certainly, from this perspective, free individuals in free societies should make their decisions freely. But at the same time, they should make decisions that are conducive to their own productivity and, therefore, to that of the community. “Prevention,” as the

first sentence of the Fit Not Fat action plan emphasizes, “is an investment in the future.”[20]

Michelle Obama received a great deal of public attention as First Lady of the United States, and it reached its apogee through her campaign against fat. Her “Let’s Move” program was aimed primarily at African American children, the goal being to motivate them to exercise more and eat better. Obama privileged information, incentives, the cooperation of school cafeterias and industry, and her own status as role model. She grew vegetables in the White House garden, cooked with children, skipped, danced, lifted weights, and did push-ups as she made her way through the American media landscape. Of course, the First Lady was aware that a program like “Let’s Move” cannot succeed by issuing directives and that fitness cannot be enforced politically. New York mayor Michael Bloomberg failed spectacularly when he tried to ban the sale of soft drinks by “food service establishments” in cups of more than 16 ounces in 2014 (a similar fate befell the German Greens in 2013 with their “Veggieday”). The New York Court of Appeals, the state’s highest court, ruled against Bloomberg’s “Soda Ban” because the New York City Board of Health lacked the authority to issue such a prohibition. The public and political battle, however, focused not on the powers of institutions, but on civil liberties. The opponents of the Soda Ban assailed the “nanny state” and its alleged fantasies of omnipotence. Michelle Obama, meanwhile, was aware of the tremendous importance of freedom of choice and decision as a political principle, a precept that has shaped the United States since its birth, attaining unprecedented heights since the 1970s. Obama thus eschewed a ban-oriented approach. Instead, she sought to mold the architecture of decision making in such a way as “to make the healthy choice the easy choice,” as she herself put it. Nonetheless, Republicans accused her

of state interventionism, highlighting the dogged nature of American battles over freedom of choice and decision.[21]

But the political dimension of the discourse on fitness and fatness goes far beyond the classic sphere of politics. It is about more than the actions of lawmakers and members of government, action plans, controversial statutory prohibitions, or sugar and fat taxes.[22] A culture and society that draws its strength and success from the productive capacity of individuals and the population as a whole may be described, with Michel Foucault, as biopolitical.[23] The "birth of biopolitics" took place in the nineteenth century, a process I describe in more detail in the next chapter. Here I give the reader advance notice that a biopolitical order has its sights set on the population and its potential, and it defines and positions people and groups through their bodies and bodily form. Such an order regulates their access to resources and social participation and thus influences the recognition they may experience as productive members of society. Body shape becomes a sign of the ability to make responsible decisions, to function in a free, competitive society and to aid its development. Hence, body shape decides who gets to be a *homo politicus*. Fatness is believed to reveal a lack of these abilities. Just as self-trackers are the prototypical embodiment of the biopolitical fitness society, and supposedly even demonstrate the desire to be and the attempt "to become a better human" (as producers of smartwatches want to make us believe), fatness seems to stand for a dearth of decision-making ability, productive capacity, and motivation.[24]

The crisis scenarios ramifying out from the alleged epidemic of obesity, then, bear witness to more than an individual problem. En masse, as the cover of the May 2010 issue of *The Atlantic* shows so clearly, fat bodies seem to

signal a crisis of liberal society, its functioning and principles (see figure 2). The corpulent Statue of Liberty carries an unambiguous message. The survival of the social order, which is based on freedom and builds on the pursuit of happiness, on autonomous action and motivation, is at risk from body fat. In fact, this social order appears to be facing imminent collapse. Slimness, agility, fitness: in an age of neoliberalism and flexible capitalism, these terms are used more than ever to describe ideal individuals and their bodies. Such terms also serve to characterize the performance of society, economy, and state. Lean bodies for a lean state, fit (typically freelance) employees for fit companies and their "lean production."[25]

Figure 2 Cover of *The Atlantic,* May 2010

“Neoliberalism” denotes a form of society and government that is always and everywhere aligned with the model of the market. This sociopolitical system construes people, in every situation, as market actors subject to competitive conditions. Moreover, neoliberalism, as political scientist Wendy Brown writes, is “a distinctive mode of reason, of the production of subjects, a ‘conduct of conduct’ [Foucault], and a scheme of valuation.” The actions of subjects must be geared toward investing in themselves in order – always and everywhere – to increase their own “portfolio value.” The goal is for these investments and one’s work on oneself to yield visible results. Such evident success enables individuals to be recognized as productive members of society. Consequently, in neoliberalism the relationship between individual and society is measured in a new way. Recognition as a citizen is not just a matter of rights. Nor is it linked solely with the individual’s concern for the public good. Such recognition arises from the individual’s success as an investor in themself and from the maximization of their human capital. It is thus the most effective investor that best meets the requirements of a good member of society: only a *homo oeconomicus* can attain the status of *homo politicus*.[26]

The political heft of fitness in neoliberalism is neatly captured by the concept of “biological citizenship.” Sociologist Nikolas Rose emphasizes just how much, in liberal societies, concern for one’s body and health, the maximization of one’s vitality and potential, has become a kind of universal duty.[27] Rose is particularly interested in the social and political implications of genetic engineering and stem cell research. According to Rose, it has become a requirement for good citizens to track suspected health issues down to the basic programming of the body, examine options for correction, and adapt their lifestyle accordingly.[28]