PHYSIQUE TRANSFORMATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF MASCULINE TIME

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By

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ABSTRACT

Beginning in the 1860s and continuing into the present day, a preoccupation with physique transformation has shaped the history of American manhood. While studies of American masculinity address the link between manhood and the muscular body type, they ignore how the fantasy of physique transformation contributes a temporal dimension to the construction of masculinity. By projecting the benefits of muscular development into the future, the fantasy of physique transformation created an idealized, masculine existence, which I call masculine time. The analysis of masculine time in discursive movements, advertisements, television programs and films reveals the mutual construction of manhood and temporality, particularly in terms of subjectivity formation. Such an approach introduces work on queer time into existing research on interpellation, subjectivity and performativity, as well as extends the reach of personal agency to the construction of temporality.
This thesis is dedicated to my mentors at Georgetown University. In particular, I thank Professors Michael Coventry, Dana Luciano and Samantha Pinto for their guidance and support. Lastly, I thank my family for their unwavering support and patience throughout this entire process.

With love and thanks, Nicholas Paul Marino
# Table of Contents

- Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 1
- Chapter I .......................................................................................................................... 8
- Chapter II ...................................................................................................................... 19
- Chapter III .................................................................................................................... 39
- Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 56
- Works Cited .................................................................................................................. 60
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

The Insult that Made a Man out of Mac ................................................................. 35
Hey Skinny!... Yer Ribs are Showing! ................................................................. 36
The Insult that Turned a “Chump” into a Champ ............................................. 37
How “Jack the Weakling” Slaughtered the “Dance-Floor Hog”! .................... 38
**INTRODUCTION:**

What is Masculine Time?

What does it mean to conceive of masculinity as a matter of temporality? To start, people use social practices and rituals to make sense of both gender and time. Often, these two sets of practices coincide with one another so much that they become indistinct. Judith Halberstam explores the mutual construction of temporality and gender in her landmark work on queer temporality, *In a Queer Time and Place*. By analyzing gendered uses of time and space, she argues that heterosexuality is constructed around “paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely birth, marriage, reproduction and death” (2). According to Halberstam, the demands and expectations associated with these life stages determine proper masculine and feminine behavior. When taken together, these rights-of-passage chart and define the makeup of an entire heterosexual life narrative. While Halberstam devotes her critical analysis exclusively to subcultural deviations from this heteronormative temporal framework, so much of the mainstream remains unexplored. In fact, masculinity studies scholars could benefit from a critical investigation of how temporality constitutes white middle-class masculinity. Such a perspective would open up new ways to view the history of American manhood in terms of masculine fantasies about time.

The connection between temporality and masculinity is strikingly present in the cultural history of bodybuilding. From the turn of the twentieth-century to the present day, physique transformation has been a central theme in the history of American manhood. Starting in the 1860s, men saw muscular development as a way to overcome social, economic and political threats to their masculinity. In the early 1900s, World War I recruitment posters used before and after images to illustrate how the army transformed thin, slouched over men into brawny...
specimens of American manhood. By the 1940s, fitness gurus built upon this technique in order to entice male consumers with the illusion of instantaneous transformation. Advertisements for fitness programs and health products embedded before and after pictures into a heroic narrative about the reclamation of masculinity. By compressing the transformation process into a single scene, they suggested that men could instantly improve their bodies and start living a more masculine life. Today, supplement advertisements and infomercials still employ this narrative formula; however, advertisers also use physique transformation scenes to market non-fitness related items. Moreover, this formula has spread beyond advertising and into the entertainment industry. Several films and television programs have worked physique transformation scenes into storylines concerned with masculinity. Though the medium and visual effects have evolved over time, the underlying promise remains the same: if a man becomes more muscular, he will lead a more fulfilling, masculine life.

Ultimately, the appeal of physique transform depends upon this idealized vision of the future. These scenes create expectations about how muscular development can change a man’s life. Because these expectations are concerned with masculinity, they shape the future into a yet-to-be-realized fantasy of manhood. This conflation of gender construction with temporality produces a new way of understanding masculinity in terms of life narratives. In other words, physique transformation scenes frame the benefits of muscular development in terms of a perfectly masculine life narrative, which I call masculine time. Thus, masculine time is an existence that fully embodies cultural and social prescriptions of manhood. When it first emerged, this ideal of perfection closely approximated a predominantly white, male middle-class fantasy of manhood, given that bodybuilding was a major preoccupation of this class group. By obtaining muscles, then, a man could gain access to masculine time and rewrite his own life
narrative along more masculine lines. Even more, masculine time provided men with a certain amount of ideological freedom during this rewriting process. More specifically, men could neatly synthesize several competing models of masculinity, like Victorian chivalry and working-class pugilism, into one fluid narrative of American manhood. Yes, life, post-physique transformation, would be nothing short of perfect, no matter which way men decided to define that ideal. Understanding masculinity in terms of life narratives builds upon existing research on manhood as a dynamic process of subjectivity formation.

**Defining Masculinity**

This discussion must begin with an obvious, though complicated question: what exactly is masculinity or manhood? Though scholars draw distinctions between these two terms, they are used interchangeably throughout this work in order to avoid tautology. This decision epitomizes one of the most formidable challenges that any scholar working in the field of masculinity studies must face: an unstable critical vocabulary. The ambiguity surrounding terms like manhood, masculinity and manliness is an obstacle within and across texts. Often, these terms are conflated with one another and used interchangeably, or, in the worst cases, treated as so self-evident that scholars do not bother to define them. This terminological opacity partly results from the field’s extremely fluid and interdisciplinary character. A typical masculinity studies reader, for instance, boasts selections from psychoanalysis, sociology, cultural studies and history. Sometimes, these writings come from researchers working specifically on the subject of manhood, other times they result from academics, who happen upon or supplement their own

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research with ideologies of masculinity. As a result, the dialogue surrounding manhood is both enriched and burdened by a competing set of glossaries, each with its own set of definitional criteria, disciplinary biases and methodological assumptions.

Yet, the dialogue on masculinity continues despite these disciplinary and terminological obstacles. For as Judith Halberstam rightfully exclaims in *Female Masculinity*, “Although we seem to have a difficult time defining masculinity, as a society we have little trouble recognizing it” (1). Manhood, then, is not simply a matter of academic inquiry, but rather something that is felt or recognized within the material and cultural specificities of a particular time and place. Furthermore, what people recognize as manhood is not exclusively the result of biological predispositions, social constructs or transhistorical essences, but rather a fluid, yet ordered process in which historically and culturally relativistic forces create and define the subject category, man. Gail Bederman theorizes manhood along such lines in *Manliness & Civilization*. In this critical investigation of twentieth-century masculinity, she argues that the construction of manhood relies upon the relationship between three metonymic facets: body, identity and power. Bederman defines masculinity, then, “as the process which creates ‘men,’ by linking male genital anatomy to a male identity, and linking both anatomy and identity to particular arrangements of authority and power” (7-8). Following Bederman’s approach, a researcher can use the three metonymic facets of manhood as an analytical framework for investigating constructs of masculinity. This method allows for an extensive historical scope, but remains attuned to the material social practices of a given culture or time period.

Understanding masculinity in such relativistic terms also makes possible the existence of several models of manhood not only at a specific time, but also throughout history. Focusing exclusively on the nineteenth-century, E. Anthony Rotundo traces a narrative of these
historically and culturally contingent ideologies in *American Manhood*. Rotundo asserts that, “like any human creation, manhood can be shaped and reshaped by the human imagination; that is manhood has a history” (1). While Rotundo narrows this history to four models, Bederman is open to the existence of several. “At any time,” she asserts, “many contradictory ideas about manhood are available to explain what men are, how they ought to behave, and what sorts of powers and authorities they may claim as men” (7). Nevertheless, the formative process that shapes gender ideology also creates the illusion that only one particular form, or expression of gender, is legitimate. “Part of the way gender functions,” Bederman claims, “is to hide these contradictions and to camouflage the fact that gender is dynamic and always changing” (7). Her stance, here, on gender’s regulatory and illusory effects invokes Judith Butler’s work on performativity.

*In Gender Trouble*, her landmark text on the deconstruction of gender, Butler describes performativity as the repetitive, citational process through which reiterated “acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core” (186). In Bederman’s work, this gender core takes the form of the subject category, man, which society stabilizes through the persistent fusion of the three metonymic facets and the consistent disavowal of alternative gender expressions. Bederman shares this deconstructive approach with Halberstam, who believes “we spend massive amounts of money ratifying and supporting the versions of masculinity that we enjoy and trust” (*Female Masculinity* 1). Often, various cultural forces construct alternative expressions of masculinity as inferior, abnormal or even impossible to imagine when compared to the hegemonic version. Though Halberstam uses this platform to debunk the association between masculinity and male bodies and discredit the legitimacy of male masculinity, this project refuses to turn away from the white, male middle-class body. While still
interrogating the connection between bodies and manhood, my investigation is more concerned with how the body functions like a trope with in the narrative of masculine construction and how this narrative cannot be dissociated from a larger temporal framework.

**A Matter of Agency**

Stylistically, physique transformation scenes shift critical attention away from corporeality and onto time. At first, the glorification of muscularity seems to suggest that masculinity is located exclusively within bodies. However, in every instance, the male’s transformation from skinny to overly muscular is accomplished not by any explicit reference to bodily capabilities, but rather through the elision, bending or collapsing of time. The body, then, figures as a trope within a narrative about the manipulation of temporality. In addition, if time is measured in terms of life narratives, then bodily transformation emerges as a way to alter or switch storylines. The significance of a body resides in the particular life narrative it symbolizes. For example, these scenes associate thin bodies with the burden of weakness, subservience, effeminacy and illness, while upholding the muscular physique as the symbol of life-long strength, dominance, heroism and vitality. Under this framework, the body emerges as a tool for manipulating the narrative construction of temporality. These scenes suggest that agency over temporality is actually a chain of effects. When a man decides to develop a more masculine physique, his agency over the corporeal form resonates through his body and into the narrative threads of time.

While physique transformation scenes are more prolific than ever, I have narrowed the scope of my analysis in order to focus specifically on the relationship between masculinity and dominance over time. For this reason, each chapter showcases how the mutual construction of manhood and temporality in physique transformation scenes shapes the form and extent of
agency. To start, chapter one analyzes how the fantasy of masculine time first emerged from the discourse surrounding muscular development at the turn of the twentieth-century. In this context, physique transformation served as a rhetorical, defensive maneuver allowing men to counter ideological threats to their masculinity. This chapter will also explain how white, middle-class men used this rhetoric to appropriate the fantasy of masculine time. Next, chapter two bridges the gap between ideology and actuality by analyzing the commodification of physique transformation. Using the advertisements for Charles Atlas’s Dynamic Tension fitness program as a narrative framework, this chapter explains how physique transformation scenes frame purchasing power as agency over the temporal construction of manhood. In this case, Althusser’s theory of interpellation will clarify how narratives of subjectivity formation can be used to structure and organize time. Finally, the third chapter will demonstrate how physique transformation provides an opportunity for marginalized subjects to disrupt and reconstruct the fantasy of masculine time. Through the analysis of modern physique transformation scenes, agency emerges as a form of resistance, a way for individuals to gain legitimacy by appropriating the temporal construction of masculinity.

Ultimately, the theory of masculine time developed in the following pages knits together several deconstructive approaches to gender, and in doing so, re-imagines gender, identity and embodiment as the products of temporality. Rather than destabilizing existing models of masculinity, this temporal shift provided a new perspective on the construction of hegemony. In other words, valued and praised versions of masculinity can be seen as “dominant times” that are projected into the future and, from there, shape the constitution and demonstration of embodied masculinity in the present.
CHAPTER ONE:
The Emergence of Masculine Time

At the turn of the twentieth-century, discourse on muscular development shared a common promise: by becoming more muscular, a man could resolve any problem threatening his sense of masculinity. For instance, in sermons and religious artwork, Muscular Christians countered the feminizing effects of religion by framing muscular development as a means to spiritual salvation. On the medical front, male physicians prescribed muscle-building exercises as a cure for debilitating neurological disorders. Lastly, in the world of popular culture, representations and displays of muscularity echoed a political rhetoric of American strength and vitality. Though the rhetoric of physique transformation appealed to a nation of self-made men, closer analysis reveals a covert set of racial, gendered and class-based restrictions. More specifically, religious, medical and political discourses used this rhetoric to create their own futural visions of an ideal white, middle-class manhood. Ultimately, a critical investigation of these discursive movements will reveal how the rhetoric of expectation surrounding physique transformation turned masculinity into a temporal construct, a desirable future that could only be realized through muscular development.

My analysis has two parts. First, I will show how the cultural need for rhetorical synthesis facilitated the muscular body’s ascendance as a symbol for masculinity. This discussion will be organized around the conflict between manliness and masculinity. Next, I will demonstrate how religious, medical and political discourses contributed different dimensions to the construction of white, middle-class masculinity through their rhetorical treatment of the muscular body. Such an approach still acknowledges the interaction of Bederman’s three metonymic facets of manhood, but skews the valence toward the symbolic power of the male
body. In the end, it will be apparent how the all three discourses are united by their reliance on temporality.

**Addressing a Crisis: The Rhetorical, Synthetic Properties of the Muscular Body**

Since the rhetoric surrounding muscular development addressed threats to manhood, this investigation must first attend to the “crisis of masculinity” thesis. Though scholars are divided on the issue, many argue that major economic, political and cultural changes from 1860-1930 jeopardized the traditional ways in which men constituted and demonstrated their sense of manhood. For instance, mass unemployment, brought on by the Great Depression, prevented men from satisfying their obligations as breadwinner and head of the household. Physically and psychologically scarred from the horrors of WWI, men also lost faith in heroic nationalism. Lastly, the campaign for women’s suffrage and the mobilization of immigrant and working-class populations threatened the political exclusivity that defined white, middle-class masculinity.

While the negative impact of these hardships cannot be ignored, to say that they catapulted manhood into an existential crisis is to deny that masculinity is always in flux. In light of Bederman’s understanding of manhood, such a crisis seems implausible given that “gender, which we have defined as an ongoing ideological process, implies constant contradiction, change, and renegotiation” (Manliness & Civilization 12). From this perspective, masculinity is always in crisis. Yet, just because fluctuation is built into the gender system, does not mean that upheavals are welcomed or, at the very least, expected. Indeed, the organized actions of men at the turn of the century reveal that a substantial amount of anxiety circulated around the constitution and display of masculinity. So, even though I do not subscribe to the crisis of
masculinity thesis, my investigation is still interested in how American men voiced their fears and confronted surmounting hardships through the rhetoric of physique transformation.

In general, rhetorical synthesis provided major relief from these insecurities by allowing men to embrace a more flexible model of manhood. To illustrate this point, consider how the importance of synthesis on the linguistic level spread through the realm of bodily materiality and into fantasies about time. To start, the turn of the century witnessed a rhetorical turf war between two words: manliness and masculinity. Though scholars use these terms interchangeably today, an important connotative distinction separated them in the early twentieth-century. On one hand, manliness referred to “all the worthy, moral attributes which the Victorian middle class admired in a man” (Bederman 18). On the other, masculinity functioned as a fluid term that could signify anything male-related. The difference between these words epitomized the growing debate between character, which was tied to innate virtues, and personality, which referred to how an individual uniquely personalized and combined a variety of values and beliefs. With its fixed, character-based connotation, manliness proved less accommodating during the early twentieth-century, when cultural and social upheavals made Victorian values seem constricting. Nevertheless, the traditional virtues of manliness never completely disappeared. Instead, Americans assimilated them unevenly into their own personalized versions of manhood. Ultimately, masculinity became the more popular term because it allowed for such synthesis.

This emphasis on synthesis in the linguistic domain influenced how men understood the relationship between masculinity and the body. By promising to simultaneously rejuvenate the physical form and revitalize masculine characteristics, the rhetoric of physique transformation framed the muscular body as the best solution to any number of masculine shortcomings. Depending on the discourse, muscular development could save a man’s soul, overcome political
powerlessness, reinstate sexual prowess, cure anxiety and counter physical debilitation. In this way, the muscular body’s rhetorical power took the form of an open-ended promise: if a man developed a muscular physique, he could expect a future free from health problems and social stigma. In fact, this promise constructed the future as a dynamic, rhetorical space, one that any discourse could shape accordingly. An analysis of religious, medical and political discourse illustrates how the rhetoric of physique transformation manipulated this promise in order to reinforce white, middle-class masculinity.

The Transformation Narrative

At the turn of the century, cultural changes in the aesthetics of masculinity translated into a discursive preoccupation with bodily transformation. As Bederman explains, “In the 1860s, the middle class had seen the ideal male body as lean and wiry. By the 1890s, however, an ideal male body required physical bulk and well-defined muscles” (15). While Bederman’s comment represents this transition as a decisive break, both body types actually existed together for a long time, at least rhetorically speaking. Even more, older, wealthy gentleman embraced a more portly body type, because it showcased their great fortune and expensive tastes. Thus, the idolization of muscularity and the detestation of thinness were specific to young middle-class men. Religious, medical and political discourses appealed to this population by constructing a narrative of physique transformation around these two opposing body types. In this context, the wiry thin gentleman of the Victorian era still persisted as a cultural example of manhood, but his existence constituted the beginning of a transformation story. Rhetorically, the thin body type functioned as a figurative object against which the superiority of the muscular could be set. This formula allowed these discourses to construct their ideologies of masculinity through the contrast
of embodied virtues or vices. Whereas some completely negated one body type and its associated characteristics, others worked toward assimilation. Nonetheless, in each case, the transformation narrative communicated a different dimension of white, middle-class masculinity.

Beginning around 1860, a masculinist, religious movement, known as Muscular Christianity, used the rhetoric of physique transformation to counter what many men saw as the feminizing effects of religion. Michael Kimmel remarks in Manhood in America that “religion had been woman’s domain,” and traditional, religious values, like humility, moralism and piety “were experienced by men as a brake on manly exuberance and a constraining critique of marketplace values” (8). Kimmel’s reference to a woman’s domain that contrasts with the male-dominated marketplace invokes the ideology of separate spheres, a culturally constructed division between masculinity and femininity based on the social arrangements of capitalism. Under this framework, men occupied the public sphere, where fierce individualism and aggressiveness translated into financial success. Middle-class men feared that the spiritual and moral education women provided in the domestic domain would hinder the development of these necessary, masculine traits. Therefore, religion and, more concretely, the church, was constructed within middle-class, Protestant American culture as a feminizing institution. The most prominent symbol of its status as such was the effeminate likeness of Christ. The goal, then, of Muscular Christianity, “was to revitalize the image of Jesus and thus remasculinize the Church” (Kimmel 177). Jesus’ body became the visual, rhetorical sight of this ideological contestation.

By emphasizing the muscular, sinewy body that Jesus attained from carpentry work, Muscular Christianity contributed several important dimensions to the rhetorical relationship between muscularity and masculinity. Primarily, Muscular Christians framed the muscular body
as a defining aspect of Jesus’ identity. As a result, muscles became a sign of deification that
reinforced the supposedly innate, spiritual superiority of the male body. Second, because
Muscular Christianity catered to a Protestant audience, this movement reserved the muscular
body’s symbolic power for a predominantly white, affluent sector of society. Consequently,
sermons carefully differentiated Jesus’ well-developed physique from the muscular body forged
by the toil of working class labor. Lastly, Muscular Christians believed that physical exercise
allowed men to improve their physical and spiritual being simultaneously.

Physique transformation, then, was not simply a matter of aesthetics. It could also change
the substance of one’s soul. As Harvey Green, author of *Fit for America*, asserts, “The body was
more than simply a container for the soul that should be kept free from disease. Its form could be
altered and perfected, and, implicitly, [a person’s] afterlife” (182). In this way, Muscular
Christianity utilized the rhetoric of physique transformation to construct its model of masculinity
according to a Christian narrative of time. The promise of spiritual salvation conflated the
process of physique transformation with an ideally Protestant life narrative, in which good deeds
resulted in a futural payoff. Through this connection to a moralistic and pure lifestyle, Muscular
Christianity worked traditional, Victorian values into its promise of an ideal, masculine
existence. However, as enticing as spiritual salvation was for Protestant men, others sought more
immediate rewards for their hard work and perseverance that would alleviate the plight of their
secular life.

Medical discourse addressed this need by connecting muscular development to class
mobility. In 1881, Dr. George M. Beard published *American Nervousness*, an accessible, widely
read study of neurasthenia, a debilitating disease targeting middle-class men. Symptoms of
neurasthenia are mostly similar to those of modern day anxiety disorders and include insomnia,
depression and fatigue, as well as head, back and genital pain. As unappealing as this malady seems, Beard’s study carefully shaped this affliction into a mark of class distinction. For one, though doctors were aware of the disorder before the Civil War, Beard argued that this health problem “became better defined and more attended to as the nation became more urbanized” (Green 137). Thus, cases of neurasthenia soared as “more men and women became subject to the pressures of office work and the increasing domestic and social pressures of middle-class life” (Green 137). By connecting this disease to urbanization and labor, Beard not only made neurasthenia into a class-issue, but also framed it as the byproduct of civilization. Resulting from the pressures of modernity, neurasthenia divided the weak from the strong in American society. In terms of social Darwinism, members of the middle-class needed to overcome this disease in order to progress in the American class system.

Because neurasthenia manifested itself physiologically on the body, Beard prescribed exercise as the best way to counteract its debilitating effects. *American Nervousness* marks an important milestone in the relationship between muscularity and masculinity, because this prescription carried strong gendered and racial restrictions. As Green remarks, “[Beard] was careful to distinguish this condition as a malady affecting men in the work force” (138). Women, Beard asserted, were exempt for this disorder because their jobs were less demanding and their “cranial capacity was 90% of men’s” (138). The rhetoric of racial superiority also contributed to this masculinist agenda, since Beard believed that “neurasthenia was not a negative phenomenon but an indication of the superiority of American and northern European cultures” (138). By associating neurasthenia with whiteness, Beard made it impossible to imagine other races and cultures suffering from such a disorder. By extension, muscular development became the exclusive privilege of white middle-class men. In Beard’s promise of a more masculine life,
physique transformation allowed a man to conquer the nervousness characteristic of his class, succeed in his career and ascend to a new tier within the social hierarchy. In medical discourse, the expectations associated with muscular development appealed to the class-based capitalistic ambitions of the middle-class.

By the 1890s, religious and medical discourses set the stage for a culture-wide worship of muscular strength. By contrast, thinness stood for effeminacy, sickness and weakness. Thus, with the glorification of the muscular body came a national aversion to weakness that distinctly impacted the political constitution of American manhood. President Theodore Roosevelt launched a rhetorical war against weakness during the turn of the century. Sickly throughout his youth, Roosevelt claimed that living in the untamed American west cured him of several childhood illnesses and toughened his character. With the help of political pundits, he dubbed this rugged lifestyle of hard labor, the strenuous life, and framed it as the solution to a national problem: the decline of the American man. A bold statement, but one that Angus McLaren, author of *Trials of Masculinity*, explains in terms of rhetorical strategy. He argues that what Roosevelt "meant, of course, was not that there was any shortage of males in the Western world… The problem was that there were too many men of the ‘wrong type’" (McLaren 11). This emphasis on types created a cultural need for examples of masculinity. In this way, two prominent figures from the emerging physical culture movement became embroiled in this political message of strength.

On June 12, 1893, European strongman, Eugen Sandow, debuted at New York City’s Casino Roof Garden. Like Roosevelt, Sandow claimed that strenuous exercise allowed him to overcome several childhood illnesses. In print media, advertisements and reviews crafted a compelling story of his personal transformation by combining elements of Victorian manliness
with a medical narrative of improved health and vitality. Yet, this dramatic tale only supplemented an even more captivating, visual performance. In his book, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America*, John F. Kasson reveals how Sandow used theatrics to create the illusion of instantaneous physique transformation. “To his gradual transformation from sickly youth to strongman,” Kasson states, “Sandow added a second, virtually instantaneous metamorphosis: from man of the crowd to marvel of muscle” (38). At the start of his show, Sandow would enter from the crowd dressed as a Victorian gentleman. This costume played an important role in the performance because Sandow believed that “a privileged class standing was vital in the new ideal of the male body” (Kasson 33). Beard would exalt in such a display, since Sandow stressed in interviews and on stage that muscular development not only improved his physical form, but also lead to rapid class-mobility.

After introducing himself to the audience, Sandow pulled at his suit, which was rigged to tear away instantly. To the crowd’s surprise, Sandow’s physique was hairless, lean and well defined. The elegance of his bodily aesthetic “shattered the prevailing image of the strongman: the barrel-chested performer in circuses, dime museums and beer halls who might be mistaken for a blacksmith but never for a gentleman” (Kasson 29). By placing his working class muscular body in peaceful coexistence with Victorian signifiers, Sandow embodied and performed the synthetic properties of masculinity. His performance concretized the rhetoric of physique transformation, making his body in particular, the sight in which Americans imprinted several desirable, masculine qualities. According to Kasson, Sandow “became an icon of the hypermasculine, who with his extraordinary muscular development literally embodied characteristics that many men and women believed were threatened by modern life” (29). Lastly,
the strongman’s emphasis on aesthetics altered the promise behind the rhetoric of physique transformation. Before, health and athletic ability were framed as the desired results of exercise. After Sandow’s captivating visual illusion, the symbolic power of muscul arity overshadowed the fitness benefits. Muscles became the new goal and physical health a secondary effect. The rhetoric remained the same, but the expectations shifted slightly under Sandow’s influence.

As aesthetic transformation became the focus of physical culture in America, an entire fitness industry developed around this goal. Even Sandow began marketing his own line of fitness manuals and exercise equipment. By the 1920s, several bodybuilding moguls enticed American men with their promise of physique transformation. The most notable of these characters was Bernarr Macfadden, an eccentric fitness guru that introduced sexual desire explicitly into the rhetoric of physique transformation. In 1899, at the height of Sandow’s career in America, Macfadden took over Physical Culture, a magazine offering fitness advice, exercise equipment and a variety of mail-order health products. Unlike the previous owners, Macfadden “shrewdly calculated that a mixture of sex and bodybuilding would certainly draw attention, especially from men” (Green 246). For this reason, most of the articles or advertisements appealed exclusively to men and the covers almost always sexualized and objectified the female form. Also, throughout the magazine, physique transformation served as the organizing theme. For instance, Green writes, “Physical Culture carried innumerable advertisements promising new ways and new gear designed to build massive arms and chests- not for sport or activity, but to improve health and performance, both in business and between the sheets” (250). By conflating career-related success with sexual prowess, Macfadden promised that physique transformation would lead to a hypermasculine, male-dominated heterosexual future. In fact, the blatant heterosexual overtones of his rhetoric verged on nationalistic propaganda. His advice articles and
his products always related bodybuilding to procreation and reinforced the fantasy of a strong, well-populated nation of men.

By the 1930s, muscles became the symbolic, rhetorical reservoir for masculinist fantasies about the future. The rhetoric of physique transformation shaped religious, medical and political ideals of masculinity into a way of life that was just within reach if a man altered his own body. This ideal existence, which I call masculine time, was marked by religious salvation, virility, health, athleticism, financial success and all other socially constructed ideals of white, middle-class masculinity. So far, my sketch of masculine time has been mainly ideological. In other words, I have primarily concentrated on the ways rhetorical movements contributed ideas to a collective fantasy within the American public imaginary. However, this fantasy, that men can use bodily transformation to rewrite their life narratives along more masculine lines, did not exist in a purely rhetorical, ideological realm. Rather, it was bound up in the material conditions of American society in the twentieth-century. As a vibrant commodity culture began to emerge from the myriad of social, political and cultural practices organized under capitalism, futural projection no longer proved so satisfying. Men wanted to access the ideal realm of masculine time immediately and they were willing to pay for such a luxury. In the next chapter, I will examine how commodification moved the fantasy of masculine time from an ideological future, to a readily accessible, material present.
CHAPTER TWO: 
Commodifying Masculine Time

Fitness advertisements in the 1940s took masculine time from the abstract realm of discourse and gave it a tangible and visual form. By this time, a few pioneering endeavors to sell bodybuilding equipment and health products had spawned a full-fledged commercial industry. Sustained by a thriving commodity culture, the physical fitness industry catered to the male consumer’s desire for immediate satisfaction. These men, who could instantly transform their image through the purchase and display of commodities, did not want to wait for an ideological projection about the future to come to fruition. In response, the rhetoric of advertising started to focus on the immediate, material realities of the present. Fitness gurus framed their products as the fastest way for men to transform their bodies and begin living the masculine dream. As a result, their representations of physique transformation omitted references to the amount of time and labor involved in bodybuilding, giving the impression that a new body could be purchased. By marketing physique transformation as an instantaneous sensation, these advertisements commodified the muscular body and its associated fantasy of masculine time.

The commodification of the muscular body is well documented in the history of American advertising; however, this practice reached a pinnacle of stylization in advertisements for Charles Atlas’s Dynamic Tension program. Each of the four advertisements tells the story of a young, thin man who suffers physical and verbal abuse at the hands of a bully in some public location. These scenes always occur at a characteristically middle-class venue, like the Coney Island beachfront, a dance hall or a carnival. After the bully’s heckling, the boy feels emasculated because of his body type, his sense of physical powerlessness and his inability to win the respect of his female companion. Fortunately, the weakling discovers Atlas’s Dynamic
Tension program and builds a muscular body of his own. The narrative ends with his triumphant return to the place of his humiliation, where he then defeats the bully with one punch and wins back the woman’s admiration. Using a panel-based narrative framework, these ads commodified not only muscularity, but also a carefully constructed form of American masculinity. Though embodiment is certainly an important trope within the advertisements, their reliance on narrative and sequencing suggests this model of masculinity is actually a matter of temporality. When read in relation to Louis Althusser’s theory of interpellation, these ads also suggest temporality can be explained according to narratives of subjectivity formation. Ultimately, these advertisements frame the purchasing power of the male consumer as an act of masculine agency over time.

_Selling a Self-Mythology_

Through the pursuit of muscularity, Charles Atlas overcame physical hardships, reclaimed his masculinity and rose within the American class system. Born Angelo Siciliano, he immigrated to the United States in 1903 at the age of eight. Growing up in early twentieth-century New York, young Angelo was a skinny and awkward child, whom the older and more strapping boys constantly harassed. This physical and emotional bullying culminated in a particularly embarrassing moment in his adolescence. In interviews, Atlas often recounted how a couple of men assaulted and ridiculed him in front of a girl at New York’s Coney Island. After this incident, Atlas turned to muscular development in order to protect his body and defend his masculinity. Inspired by a jungle cat stretching its muscles at the Brooklyn Zoo, he created, “Dynamic Tension,” a weight-free method of strength training that pitted the force of one muscle against another. Soon, Angelo became so muscular his friends began calling him Atlas, after a statue of the mythic hero on a hotel in New York City. In 1922, he won Macfadden’s “World’s Most Perfectly Developed Man” Competition, a well-publicized event staged at Madison Square
Garden. After legally changing his name that same year, Charles Atlas worked his way up from vaudeville strongman to successful male model and, finally, wealthy business tycoon.

Yet, Atlas had great difficulty launching his business until 1941, when he partnered with a young, competitive advertising agent named, Charles Roman. Roman fashioned Atlas’s self-mythology into the iconic advertisement, “The Insult that Made a Man out of Mac!” In the decade that followed, he created three more versions of the advertisement: “Hey Skinny!... Yer Ribs are Showing!,” “The Insult that Turned a ‘Chump’ into a Champ,” and “How Jack the Weakling Slaughtered the Dance-Floor Hog” (See Illustrations 1-4 respectively). According to Yours in perfect manhood, Charles Atlas, the only authorized biography on the fitness guru, Roman’s advertising genius resurrected the failing company. However, biographer Charles Gaines tenuously marks the limits of Roman’s influence by stating, “It is inaccurate to say that Charles Roman made Charles Atlas, since Atlas was in the purest possible sense of the term a self-made man; but it is not at all inaccurate to say that without Roman there would probably have been no access to the market for the product regardless of who made it” (65). Despite Gaines endeavor to shift the focus back to Atlas, the facts about the man have been subsumed by Roman’s commercialized myth. Using Atlas’s Coney Island story, Roman fashioned a carefully constructed ideology of white middle-class masculinity into a compelling narrative about a young man who reclaims his manhood through muscular development.

Stylistically, the telling of that narrative depends upon a linear construction of temporality. More specifically, the use of comic book panels represents this visual conceptualization of time as homogenous. Building off Henri Bergson’s work on the topic, Bliss Cua Lim explains exactly how homogenous time is bound up with notion of space. In Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique, she states, “Conceiving of
ordered events in time means taking each element as a distinct unit that can be assigned a position in relation to the others, implying a spatial-conceptual juxtaposition” (48). In this light, homogeneity means that the units used to quantify and measure time are not just uniform and empty, but also that they follow a steady linear progression. The Dynamic Tension ads construct temporality in a similar fashion. The frames, which are identically sized and evenly spaced, depict crystallized, temporal moments in a linear narrative, which the reader can use to trace how and why the weakling transforms his body and his life. In this way, the comic maps out both the progression of temporality and a narrative of subjectivity formation.

From this reason, each compartmentalized moment depicts a different stage in the development of the protagonist’s masculine subjectivity. During the creation process, Roman realized that the success of these ads was contingent upon this visual strategy. In an interview for Atlas’s biography, he states, “The ads began to isolate elements of an ideal manhood through strength- courage, independence, attractiveness to women, self-determination- to identify Atlas as the embodiment of these elements, and his course as the method of acquiring them” (Yours in Perfect Manhood 69). Roman made these masculine qualities visible by associating them with social behaviors. As the narrative unfolds, the represented actions in each panel communicate a different facet of Roman’s ideology of white, middle-class masculinity. Though this visual strategy was certainly compelling, he realized that representation alone would not bring success. In order to sell Atlas’s product, he also had to make this ideology of masculinity a reality for the American male consumer.
The Temporal Map of Subjectivity Formation

Althusser’s theory of interpellation explains how, in each panel, social practices connect Roman’s ideology of masculinity to the materiality of everyday life. In his essay, “Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses,” Althusser defines interpellation as a unilateral, linear process in which “ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all)” (118). Important to note is that the formative process of interpellation does not occur in some abstract theoretical realm, but in the lived experiences of actual individuals. Returning to the notion of hailing, Althusser explains, “all ideology hails or interpolates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of the subject” (118) [My emphasis].

Althusser’s use of the term concrete not only accentuates the fact that interpellation occurs in the material practices of everyday life, but also indicates that in their mutual concretization, the actual individual is not dissociable from the ideological category of the subject. Also, Althusser adds that individuals occupy several subjective positions at any given time, and that multiple overlapping ideological hails constitute these positions simultaneously.

As a member of society that performs any number of material, social practices or rituals, the protagonist of the advertisement is already a subject before the narrative even begins. To explain further, consider what happens when just one subject category is introduced. Though Althusser does not explicitly mention gender, the ads assign its protagonist, Mac, to the male sex. As such, he is subject to and also perpetuator of the various demands and behavioral expectations on his gender. In addition, he may simultaneously occupy several other associated subject categories, like son, brother, boyfriend or laborer. Despite the fact that the process of interpellation originates from any number of external sources, the force of the hail is still
unilateral, meaning that it emanates from one side, the hailer. For Althusser, this individual is the prime mover of a very specific storyline, which moves forward to its deterministic conclusion. When Athusser states that hails constitute a subject, he does not mean that the subject did not exist prior. Rather, the specific hail, coming from a specific position of authority, calls a specific individual into a designated state-of-being. In the advertisements, the story of subjectivity formation is based on a body-centered, white middle-class masculinity.

Althusser uses dramatization to demonstrate how interpellation occurs. This strategy hinges upon a simple narrative: “the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: ‘Hey, you there!’” (118), to an individual on the street. When the individual responds to the policeman’s call by turning around, he becomes a subject. Thus, recognition is a key component of the hailing process. Yet, what exactly does Althusser mean by the term, hailing. Immediately, the act of speaking comes to mind, but the connotation is much more specific. To hail means to call out to someone, to summon his attention. The motive behind this gesture is another matter entirely. Emanating from a policeman, the speech act contains the repressive power of the State; its effects are regulatory and disciplinary. In Althusser’s dramatization, hailing always takes the form of a speech act. However, given his assertion that ideology exists in social actions, hailing should be extended to any number of physical expressions. In fact, I argue that the Althusserian notion of hailing is characterized by an ambiguous tension between verbal and physical force. This tension is introduced and resolved definitively in the Atlas advertisements’ representation of masculinity.

In the first advertisement, “The Insult that Made a Man out of Mac,” the conflict between verbal and physical hailing translates into a battle for dominance between men. In the first panel, a young man, presumably Mac, yells, “Hey! Quit kicking that sand in our faces,” to another man,
whose legs are pictured kicking a steady stream of sand at Mac and his girlfriend. Even though Mac executes the first speech act of the scene, his command is not the first act of hailing. Here, I would like to focus more closely on the act of sand kicking, and how this bullying gesture extends Althusser’s conception of hailing. In Althusser’s dramatization, the policeman’s call is a verbal injunction that elicits a response. However, this advertisement, as well as the others, illustrates that actions, particularly hostile or violent ones, can also carry the citational power of the speech act. With the exception of the “Hey Skinny!” advertisement, which will be discussed in detail later, the bully quite literally kicks off the interpellation process with a physical attempt to dominate the other man. If he’s not kicking sand, the bully’s challenging the weaker man to a strength test, (“The Insult that Turned a ‘Chump’ into a champ”) or shoving him on a dance floor (“How ‘Jack the Weakling’ Slaughtered the ‘Dance-Floor Hog!’”).

Even more, the Atlas ads suggest that physical hails possess greater force than their verbal counterparts. Consider, once again, the weakling’s verbal response to the bully’s combative hails. After the initial insult in the first panel, the less muscular man attempts to reconstitute his threatened masculinity in the next. Joe, from the “Hey Skinny!” ad, exclaims “Watch what you say, fella...,” while Jack of the dance-hall protests, “Say! You almost knocked us over!” Finally, the chump, also conveniently named, Joe, remarks, “See here, you better shut up or I’ll....” Unfortunately, for both Joes, their verbal injunction devolves into a series of ellipses because the bully’s second physical attack curtails the speech act. At this stage in the hailing process, the bully reasserts his interpellating power by coupling his verbal hail with an abusive reprimand. Grabbing Mac’s arm, he yells, “Listen here. I’d smash your face... only you’re so skinny you might dry up and blow away.” Likewise, in the “Hey Skinny!” advertisement, the bully exclaims, “Shut up you bag of bones!,” before punching the skinny boy
in the face. Lastly, in the “Chump to Champ” advertisement, the bully berates the weakling by saying, “You chump!” prior to delivering a blow with the back of his fist. Thus, the bully’s violent response to Mac’s hail in the second panel of each advertisement is more than just an act of physical domination.

Judith Butler’s recapitulation of interpellation explains why the assault is just as important as the verbal hail. In Bodies That Matter, she emphasizes the fact that interpellation is a two part process. Initially, she agrees with Althusser stating that the hail “is formative, if not performative, precisely because it initiates the individual into the subjected status of the subject” (121). Nevertheless, she argues that this individual is not “fully a social subject, is not fully subjectivated, for he or she is not yet reprimanded” (121). It is through the reprimand that “the subject not only receives recognition, but attains as well a certain order of social existence, in being transferred from an outer region of indifferent, questionable, or impossible being to the discursive or social domain of the subject’” (121). In the weakling ads, the reprimand enters the hailed individual into the social arrangements of hegemonic masculinity where physical dominance functions as the basis for manhood.

This ideology of masculinity also extends into the representation and the performance of the hailer. By picturing this individual as a policeman, Althusser suggests that the hailer embodies the constitutive power of the law. In the context of the advertisements, the bully stands in for the policeman, offering a literal reading of this embodiment that complicates Althusser’s theory. At first, the two subject positions, policeman and bully, seem to be at odds ideologically. After all, the bully is the hooligan. He, not the weaker man, is guilty of assault. While this may seem to negate his role as a policeman figure, a slight shift in perspective reveals that the bully is the protector and enforcer of a different law: masculine embodiment. In Althusserian form, the
particularities of this law, and the ideology of masculinity it upholds, can only be ascertained from the represented social interactions.

For this reason, the advertisements repeatedly channel the constitutive power of the law through the figure of the muscular body. As R.W. Connell aptly notes in *Gender & Power*, “the social definition of men as holders of power is translated not only into mental body-images and fantasies, but into muscle tensions, posture, the feel and texture of the body” (85). A close reading of the “Hey Skinny!,” advertisement explains how that translation process occurs. Unlike the other narratives, an injurious speech act sets the action of the plot into motion. At the top of the page, the phrase, “Hey SKINNY!... YER RIBS ARE SHOWING!” stands out in large, bold-faced type. Framed by the thick black line of a speech bubble, this citation is the first detail to catch the reader’s eye. Tracing the line of the speech bubble to its origin, the reader discovers that these words are spoken by a man at the top right hand corner of the page. The thick muscles of the man’s neck and shoulders stand out prominently, as he stares at a smaller, comparatively thinner man who barely fills out a pair of swimming trunks. Sitting high on the thinner man’s waist, the swimsuit resembles a skirt more than shorts. The reader can plainly see that this scene takes place at a public beach, where the panoptic gaze of fellow beachgoers contributes another layer of public humiliation to the social dynamic constituted by the speech act.

Here, the subjects and their particular roles within a given social order are constituted through this act of hailing. The bully’s body-centered insults, which are debasing and emasculating to the second male, interpellates the former as the weakling. This scene extends Althusser’s theory of interpellation, for if the bully/policeman maintains the social order of the beach, what transgression did the weakling commit? Based on the hail of the bully, it appears that the weakling is guilty of being too thin. If the policeman represents the embodiment of the
law, then, by extension, the form and contours of his body should also represent that law. Thus, it becomes clear from the power dynamic constituted by the reprimanding hail that the weakling, as a man, is in violation of a social or cultural law, which states that masculinity and muscularity are linked. Because of his muscular body and the physical strength it affords, the bully successfully gains control over the hailing process. In the third panel, the boy can only say, “The big bully! I’ll get even some day.” However, since Mac cannot physically defeat this man, his only consolation is to revert to speech acts. But, alas, the act is empty unless it can be supported by the power of reprimand and channeled through the muscular body. In this way, the physical acts of hailing take precedence over the speech act. Mac’s only hope is to transform his body, trump the bully and regain the respect and dependency of the girl.

Even more, the female’s role in this narrative is tied to the construction of linear temporality. Like clockwork, she enters the story in order to reinforce the demands of heterosexuality. Her response to the bully adds another important dimension to the process of interpellation. For instance, in the first advertisement, Mac’s girlfriend responds to the sand-kicking bully by turning to Mac and exclaiming, “That man is the worst nuisance on the beach!” This statement functions as a subtle hail, which enters all three individuals into a particular social arrangement of heterosexual desire. More specifically, the female neither directly addresses the bully, nor intervenes on behalf of her own safety. The fact that she always voices her discontent to Mac emphasizes that it is his responsibility to protect their mutual comfort and safety. Also, do not forget that she is responding to the bully’s physical attack. Just like Mac, she is also interpellated by the assault. Since all subjects are transformed in the process of interpellation, the female, though not directly addressed or attacked, becomes a coveted object, a conduit for the homosocial drama to unfold. The bully’s goal, then, is not just to make the weakling feel inferior
to other men physically, but also to render his masculinity ineffectual within a heterosexual social framework.

The woman’s response also carries constitutive power because her reaction gauges how well, or in this case, how poorly the weakling satisfies the social obligations of heterosexual masculinity. As such, her rebukes of the weakling contribute more power to the bully’s derogatory hails. For instance, every time the weakling attempts to stand up for himself and his girlfriend, his verbal castigations are met with another dose of physical violence. The impact of these assaults on her boyfriend’s masculine subjectivity is worsened by the woman’s comments. In the first advertisement, she condescendingly states, “Oh don’t let it bother you little boy!,” as Mac stands close by with his thin shoulders slumped in humiliation. In this case, her command reversing the power arrangements of heterosexuality by relegating him to the subject position of a child. Notice how the underscoring of “bother” makes her sound like a mother placating and consoling a young child after a round of schoolyard bullying. Even more, the sarcastic comment serves as a subterfuge for a subtle attack on Mac’s sexual virility. More specifically, this attack on his adulthood leads to a subjective reversion from the budding sexual maturity of adolescence to childhood. This idea is reinforced in the “Chump to Champ” advertisement, in which the woman ridicules her boyfriend in a similar fashion: “Oh Joe, when are you going to grow up and be a MAN!” As these comments reflect, the weakling is in a temporally ambiguous spot in his bodily and social development. Somewhere between boyhood and manhood, he suffer his girlfriend’s derision and the bully’s assaults, both of which threaten to disrupt and regress his linear progression into manhood, unless he can somehow reclaim agency over his own life narrative.
From the moment the bully’s assault animates this imaginary world, each panel works meticulously to create a situationally-specific form of masculinity based on pugilism, bodily aesthetics and the subservience of women. In a familiar and comforting way, each advertisement follows the same arch of redemption: our protagonist is introduced in the beginning, challenged in the middle and reclaims his lost sense of power in the end. The story always culminates in the acquisition of the muscular body. In the final frame, the protagonist stands proudly as the public’s new hero, his muscular body on full display. At this point, several narratives of time are compressed within the image of the muscular body. In addition to this tale of heroism, the muscular body signifies narratives of bodily and sexual development. For instance, as males grow from childhood to adulthood, hormones alter the aesthetics and composition of their bodies. Though the increase of muscul arity is just one in a myriad of bodily changes men experience during adolescence, these advertisements highlight this feature as a definitive sign of manhood. Yet, as evidenced by the weakling, not all male bodies comply with this standard. In such cases, men, like the weakling, become temporally stalled. They are denied access to an embodied right-of-passage- the acquisition of muscles- that not only confirms their sense of masculinity, but also their sexuality. However, this construct of masculinity is specific to this advertisement alone. Remember, Atlas’s company sells a commodity. The narrative’s ability to capture the attention of the consumer both exposes and disguises its function as a hail. Just as Mac becomes the hapless subject of this construct of masculinity, so too does the consumer.

**Consuming Masculine Time**

On the level of consumption, the protagonist’s decision to change his body and his life is a carefully constructed expression of agency. American consumer culture is grounded on what seems to be an unquestionable supposition: that individuals are autonomous, freethinking
subjects. Yet, to Althusser, the individual subject is not a matter of self-evidence, but “an ideological effect, the elementary ideological effect” (116). In other words, since ideology frames itself as a perception of reality, its first task is to demarcate and define a real, material world where individuals exist autonomously. However, this agency is never innate, but merely an illusion of ideology. Under Althusser’s framework, a person is not a self-defining subject who initiates original or spontaneous actions. Rather, it is the subject’s reliance on and engagement with existing material, social rituals that cosign his subjectivity to the constitutive power of ideology. To clarify, Althusser states, “You and I are always already subjects, and as such constantly practice the rituals of ideological recognition, which guarantee for us that we are indeed concrete, individual, distinguishable and (naturally) irreplaceable subjects” (117). In this way, what defines us as freethinking, spontaneous agents that are unique from one another is an illusion created and sustained by the material practices in which ideology takes its form.

In American commodity culture, the representational power of commodities sustains this illusion of agency. As Anne Norton argues in Republic of Signs, “In what they own, in how they furnish their homes, in what they drive, and most of all in what they wear, Americans endeavor to represent themselves. In doing so, they employ their products as a system of signs” (51). Individuals can manipulate and arrange these superficial personality markers in any number of creative ways. Though income level certainly restricts the amount of play people can exercise over this symbolic arrangement, the belief that identity is, indeed, mutable appealed to all Americans. With the rise of commodity culture at the turn of the century, the freedom to construct one’s identity through aesthetic alterations conflated purchasing power with agency in a way that amended capitalism to democracy. As Norton claims, “the structural bond between capitalism and democracy in American political culture lies, both ideally and materially, in the
primacy of representation” (50). Thus, when commodities are imbued with the creative power to change one’s identity, the act of purchasing becomes a personal and political action of democratic autonomy; it is the freedom to speak through one’s commodities and to exercise equal access to the identity-constituting process of self-commodification.

The Dynamic Tension ads suggest that for as little as the price of a stamp any man can transform his physique. As its representations of musculature filtered through the capitalist marketplace, muscles and their associated masculine lifestyle were transformed into a commodity. An umbrella term used to describe any place where items are sold for profit, the marketplace is the foundation of capitalist societies. To explain further, the term can refer to actual locations, such as shopping districts or individual stores, and to ideological spaces, such as an imagined marketplace spanning the country. In either case, the marketplace sustains a rigid social structure, wherein the manufacturer benefits from the profitable sale of his commodities, while the laborers remain alienated from social and monetary exchange. Most importantly, because the arrangements of the marketplace distance the product from the actual human laborers, the consumer believes that commodities have a mystical existence of their own, as well as unique properties. These properties refer to the items themselves- i.e. their ability to signify wealth and class- and to the transferal of meaning upon their possessors. In the Atlas ads, the muscular body is distanced from the bodybuilding process. Because consumers do not see the time and effort involved in the development of such a physique, the muscular body attains a mystical, fetishized existence as a commodity.

As the narrative draws to a hasty close, the mechanics of reading distract the consumer from inquiring about the bodybuilding process, while convincing him to purchase the product. Like watching the hands of a clock tick forward, the consumer’s eyes move forward from left to
right, following each uniformly framed temporal moment towards its narrative conclusion. This exercise in spectatorship internalizes the power of homogenous time, creating an affectively perceived connection with the linear movement of the temporal reckoning device. As Lim explains, duration within and clock time without “sync up in the simultaneity of spectatorship. That is, watching the clock, the spectator misapprehends, too, the interpenetrating succession of his own inner duration as corresponding to the discrete numerical intervals of a time piece” (51). While Lim’s explanation uses clock-time as its grounding principle, the phenomenon of temporal simultaneity she describes still occurs in the advertisement because the space of each panel functions like the space between minute lines of the clock. As the consumer witnesses each of Mac’s momentary hails, he experiences them as his own. Thus, the concept of homogenous time provides one explanation of the psychological mechanics behind Althusserian hailing.

The reader follows this journey until the panels end and his eyes are greeted with a large picture of Atlas himself. Somewhere near this hulking figure is another panel with the same proportions as those of the comic book narrative. Here, the consumer must make his democratic choice. By filling his information in this box and sending the page to Atlas’s company, he can change his own body, as well as the course of his life. He has already psychologically bought into Atlas’s ideology of masculine embodiment, now it is time for him to make the monetary investment. With a little money, perseverance and time, the consumer can buy a better, more masculine life. But, how long until the benefits of Atlas’s program begin to take effect? For the weakling, it is instantaneous. He is thin in one panel, and massively muscular in the next. While the linear trajectory remains intact, important details have been skipped over in the storytelling. In the chapter that follows, I will address this temporal slip in more detail. This act of temporal
disruption not only opens the ideology of masculine time to new appropriations, but also changes
the way people understand their sense of agency in time.
Illustration 3:

The Atlas advertisements illustrate the theoretical mechanics behind the construction of masculine time. As time moves forward, a chain of hails collects in the past and constitutes an individual’s present subjectivity. Under this temporal framework, a life narrative is story of the reception and fulfillment of hails. Masculine time, then, emerges as a new life path that distinctly breaks from the trajectory of one’s subjectivation. Representations of physique transformation, beginning with those from the Dynamic Tension ads, suggest that this temporal diversion can happen instantaneously. In these fictitious scenarios, a man’s desire for a more masculine life drives him toward the pursuit of muscularity. Immediately after deciding to change his body, he undergoes a sudden and dramatic transformation. Eye-catching special effects or simple before and after photos compress the transformation process into a single, dynamic moment in which the individual’s body immediately grows more muscular and well-defined. Thanks to his new body, the transformed man shirks the constraints of his past and starts leading a more masculine lifestyle.

By omitting the bodybuilding process entirely, these physique transformations scenes suggest that the man’s decision to change caused the dramatic transformation. The sense of immediacy behind these representations of self-reinvention raises important questions about the relationship between temporality and agency: if the constitution of subjectivity depends upon the accumulation of hails over time, how does the manipulation of temporality within these scenes complicate this process? Can an individual actually halt and then redirect the constitutive power of interpellation in a single moment? And, if this form of resistance stems from physique
transformation, what do these scenes suggest about the temporal nature of bodily materiality?

The answer to these questions lies in a more critical examination of resistance.

In this chapter, I will examine how physique transformation scenes destabilize the process of interpellation at the site of its temporal construction. Essentially, the fantasy of masculine time depends on a destabilizing moment when the propulsion behind interpellation’s formative power slips and creates an interstice where an individual can reconstitute his subjectivity. Henri Bergson’s theory of how memory and perception create zones of indetermination provides a structure for reading physique transformation scenes in terms of masculine time. Because Charles Atlas started this representational tradition, I will use the Dynamic Tension ads to establish a foundational understanding of how physique transformation scenes rely on zones of indetermination. Once Bergson’s theory has been defined and contextualized, I will use two contemporary examples of physique transformation scenes to show how zones of indetermination also open masculine time to appropriations by women and gay men. Drawing from Butler’s theory of performativity, I argue that resistance is a form of temporal intervention, a way to stop the momentum of hailing and redirect its power back at the figure of authority. Through my analysis of modern physique transformation scenes, I will not only demonstrate how linear temporality plays a central role in Butler’s work on performativity, but also show how these scenes re-imagine resistance outside a linear temporal framework through the use of zones of indetermination. This new understanding of agency creates a chiasmic framework of subjectivity.

**Reading the Physique Transformation Scene as a Zone of Indetermination**

The Dynamic Tension ads provide an insightful way to explain zones of indetermination. First theorized by Henri Bergson in *Matter and Memory*, and later revitalized in the writings of
Giles Deleuze, these zones are temporal pauses, brief instances of reflection, when an individual can alter the future depending on how memories of the past inform perception and decision-making in the present. To clarify, consider how the weakling’s decision to transform his body alters the course of his life narrative. In the early versions, the physique transformation scene occupies only two panels, with the exception of “Hey Skinny!,” which condenses it into just one. In the “before panel,” the protagonist declares that he is “sick of being a scarecrow,” while violently unleashing his frustration on the surrounding furniture. Clearly, the weakling’s anger stems from his recollection of past events. In *Time Travels*, Elizabeth Grosz synthesizes Bergon’s and Deleuze’s theoretical examinations of how memory, or recollection in this instance, assists perception during the decision making process. The basis for this subjective experience resides in cognitive processes. As Grosz notes, “The brain enables multiple, indeterminable connections between what the organism receives (through perception and affection) and how it acts” (98). In this arrangement, perception is tied to the present, to the flood of stimuli an organism receives at any given moment, while memory organizes this influx of sensory experiences. To accomplish its goal, memory supplies perception with a stock of images. Each image exists independently as a readily accessible snapshot of how that individual engaged with matter in the past. Since a person can only experience matter via this image-processing system, all matter for Bergson and Deleuze “is an aggregate of ‘images’” (Grosz 96). This reliance on the materiality of images translates well to the comic style narrative of the Atlas ads.

Given the medium of print advertising, the stored images of the weakling’s past remain accessible in the preceding panels. Each one is distinct and equivalent to one another, for as Bergson notes, “in the perception of matter, there is no higher order image” (Grosz 97). Each image is just as substantial as another, there is no primacy given to their organization. A zone of
indetermination, then, designates a spot where these images are connected to one another and mobilized in unique ways to spur action. In this case, memory fuels the weakling’s desire to right the injustices of the past and motivates him to “gamble a stamp” on Charles Atlas’s free book. The weakling’s quick reaction to the ad mimics the fleeting pause between stimulus and response described by Bergson. Yet, as much as the advertisement stresses the importance of this decision, its marketing ploy hinges upon a nearly invisible, though highly powerful, zone of indetermination.

As the consumer’s eyes traverse the small white gap separating this frame from the “after panel,” they stop short at the sight of the former-weakling’s newly transformed, well-defined muscular physique. Normally, dramatic results like these appear after months, or even years, of strenuous exercise and strict dieting. Here, this process happens immediately in an unrepresented window of opportunity between the two panels. The temporally ambiguous signifier, “Later,” indicates a time lapse, but the consumer receives no insight into what happened between the previous panel and this one. For Bergson, the temporal delay between stimulus and reaction makes “possible a genuine freedom from predictability and [makes] an open-ended future inevitable at least as far as life is concerned” (Grosz 99). As far as the weakling’s life is concerned, it seems as if he stepped through a time portal and into a new life narrative, which he always dreamed of occupying. In rapid succession, the weakling receives a new body, returns to the same location on the beach (where no one has apparently moved or changed clothing), pummels the bully, reclaims his girlfriend’s admiration and becomes “the hero of the beach.” However, the zone of indetermination’s unpredictability has also transferred to the realm of bodily materiality. As a stimulus, the ad spurs more than just the weakling’s conviction; it compresses temporality and immediately bestows upon him the body he envisioned in the future.
With its dramatic reveal and promise of instant gratification, the temporal acceleration of stimulus and response distracts consumers from considering the limitations of bodily materiality. The unappealing particulars of bodybuilding— the time, pain and danger involved— disappear behind the dazzling trope of instantaneous physique transformation.

The Atlas secret, then, is not simply a pamphlet of exercise diagrams and dietary principles, it is an opportunity to disrupt the chain of negative hails, to shirk the accumulation of subject positions as if they were so many discarded images, and rearrange the matter of one’s life in more desirable ways. To do so requires a new understanding of bodily materiality. Consumers must dissociate the muscular physique from its corporeal existence, which changes slowly and experiences the pain of muscle tearing and building back up over time. Physique transformation scenes carefully erase these temporal and corporeal realities by constructing the body as a mutable image that one can change at will. However, by disrupting the temporal basis of interpellation, and distracting the consumers from the corporeality of the body, these ads jeopardize their intended message. Atlas clearly attempted to hail the male consumer in such a way that reinforced the link between muscularity and masculinity. His compression of temporality into a one or two panel physique transformation scene allowed him to commercialize and package an otherwise abstract fantasy. In this form, the fantasy of masculine time could be communicated quickly and repetitively. The success of this approach secured a spot for Atlas in American cultural awareness. Even today, fitness supplement advertisements situate their before and after photos within a narrative of masculinity. Nonetheless, one outcome that Atlas’s company could not foresee was the myriad of ways in which this framework would be appropriated by disenfranchised populations.
Resistance through Rearticulation in Contemporary Physique Transformations Scenes

If the sensationalistic imagery failed to convince the savvy consumer at first, mass proliferation prevented him from completely escaping its discursive effects. In virtually every masculine-themed publication, from Superman comics to Boy Scout newsletters and various men’s magazines, the Dynamic Tension advertisements reiterated their theory of white, middle-class masculinity to a diverse, American male consumer base. By repeatedly exposing consumers to this rhetoric, the marketing strategy behind the Atlas ads demonstrates the foundational principle of Judith Butler’s performativity. As Butler states in *Bodies That Matter*, “performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act,’ but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces that effects that it names” (2). Over time, the advertisements were repeated so often that Americans embraced the fantasy of instantaneous physique transformation, and its associated ideologies of masculinity and agency, as truth. Their coalescence with various cultural movements also compounded this effect by adding to and reiterating the rhetoric of physique transformation, which characterized the cultural climate of masculinity in the early twentieth century.

Though these rhetorical forces intended to communicate an exclusively male, heterosexual fantasy, the mass proliferation of the physique transformation scenes opened masculine time to queer appropriations. Butler attributes this opportunity to an intrinsic flaw of performativity. More specifically, performativity’s dependence on the constant repetition and accumulation of citations over time “is a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled” (2). Materialization is a particularly meaningful term in this instance, because it refers to the process by which bodies become viable and recognized within a dominant social framework. The Atlas
ads and the rhetoric of physique transformation performatively linked the muscular body to masculinity. In Bederman’s terms, they fused a sexed body-type (the muscular male body) with an identity (white, middle-class masculinity) and assigned this embodied being to a high position within a hegemonic power structure. Nevertheless, as Butler’s work illustrates, temporality is the necessary force behind this consolidation of metonymic facets. As such, time functions as a fourth metonymic facet. Physique transformation scenes disrupt this consolidation by manipulating temporality. The zone of indetermination, which promises the white, male consumer an escape from deterministic hails affects other subject categories, as well as other people. Holding constant Althusser’s belief that ideology hails and recruits all concrete individuals as subjects, I argue that any disruption to the process of interpellation spreads beyond the intended subject and throughout the associated web of constitutive hails.

Since the rhetoric of physique transformation originally attempted to keep homosexuals and women out of the domain of white heterosexual middle-class masculinity, it follows that these same individuals could seize upon the zone’s destabilizing power to reconstitute their own subjectivation. This appropriation can take two forms. First, advertisers or writers can rearticulate the storyline of the Dynamic Tension ads so that marginalized populations benefit from the impact of the physique transformation scene. By focusing on narrative, this approach locates masculinity within the arrangement of tropes, not in particular subjects. These physique transformation scenes draw attention away from individuals, and toward the constitutive processes in which their characters’ subjectivities are embedded. The zone of indetermination, then, reshuffles the narrative conventions in order to empower marginalized subjects. The second form of appropriation is concerned with how individuals react to their own implication within this narrative construction of masculinity. This perspective refocuses on the individual, and
examines how his or her actions consciously rearticulate the tropes of masculinity. As such, this expression of appropriation restores faith in personal agency. An analysis of two contemporary physique transformation scenes will clarify how both forms of appropriation characterize the resistance to and reconstruction of masculinity.

To begin, consider how one advertisement appropriates masculine time for homosexual men through a clever rearticulation of Atlas’s narrative formula. In 1999, Perfetti Van Melle, a European candy company, released a television commercial that used physique transformation to sell its product, Vigorsol Gum. The commercial begins in a dark, deserted back alley where a lone man, short and conservatively dressed, enters and looks about nervously. Jerking his head in different directions, he appears lost and a little worried, but eventually makes his way to an open nightspot called Moon Bar. Once inside, the faint drone of club music fills the room and the tourist, clearly uncomfortable, jettisons to the bar and orders a drink. As he turns around to survey the crowd, his backpack inadvertently knocks a full glass onto a nearby patron. The victim of the spill, a broad shouldered, muscular male interprets the tourist’s innocent misstep as an attack. For this reason, the accident serves as an unintentional, but still effective, injurious hail. Though the tourist executed the hail, the patron’s unforgiving, threatening response positions the former as the weakling and the latter as a bully. Even more, body type adds to this characterization, since the tall muscular man assumes an intimidating stance over the small, stocky tourist. In accordance with the Atlas formula, both individuals seem propelled toward an inevitable battle for dominance.

However, the accidental spill does more than interpellate both individuals within this pugilistic construct of white male masculinity; it enters them into a zone of indetermination. Elements of the mise-en-scène represent the zone of indetermination as a temporal pause, in
which both time and action freezes. Just like in the Atlas ads, one decision can reanimate and redirect them both in unique and unpredictable ways. For example, once the drink spills, all movement in the room stops abruptly and the screech of a needle dragging across a record brings the music to a disturbing halt. All eyes turn to the bully and the tourist, heightening the significance of the moment. The panoptic force of this gesture also seems to propel them toward confrontation. However, unlike the medium of print advertising, which literally captures images of the past on the page, the television commercial provides no contextualization beyond the represented confrontation. Thus, the construction of the zone of indetermination depends upon the viewer’s familiarity with the narrative formula. Drawing from personal memories and recollections, the consumer knows, habitually and intuitively, that in such pairings, the taller, more muscular man always defeats the smaller, weaker one. The commercial’s dependence on the consumer’s memory betrays its performative foundation. After all, the consumer’s familiarity with these tropes- the oppositional body types, the impending fight and its expected outcome-results from repeated exposure to this narrative formula. By connecting the represented events to his own memory, the viewer places himself empathetically into the action and legitimizes this constructed, pugilistic form of masculinity as reality.

Also, because he is familiar with the formula, the consumer expects the instantaneous physique transformation. Thinking fast, the tourist retrieves a piece of gum from his shirt pocket and, after a few seconds of vigorous chewing, begins to change. Through the use of special effects, the consumer witnesses the tourist’s muscles inflate almost magically right before his eyes. The sound of balloons filling with air adds a comedic touch to the scene. The humor involved in this representation of physique transformation subtly suggests that the ad is conscious of its own formulaic construction. Even the tourist seems to be in on the joke. He
smiles throughout the transformation process, certain that this bout of muscle inflation has
evened, if not tipped the odds in his favor. Ultimately, the commercial’s self-awareness
predicates an unpredictable twist. When the transformation ends, the tourist discovers that
passing through the zone of indetermination has unexpected results. Instead of cowering away
from or attempting to resume the confrontation, the bully cruises the tourist’s new body with his
eyes and then bites down flirtatiously on one of his fingers. The tourist gulps nervously, for in
that moment, he realizes Moon Bar is actually a gay nightspot and that his new muscular body
makes him a primary object of attraction. In this version of masculine time, the construct of
white, middle-class masculinity remains intact, but the transition from homosocial dominance to
homosexual cruising alters the nature of the fantasy. Like the original formula, women are
excluded and effeminate men marginalized, but the perception of masculinity has changed. The
masculine qualities that have been performatively linked to muscular body translate into sexual
currency within the gay dating scene. The commercial’s finale, which features the two men
dancing romantically in the empty club, marks the last clever rearticulation of the Atlas formula.
Just as the former-weakling of the Dynamic Tension ads embraces his new life as the hero of the
beach, the tourist also accepts his new life narrative through the physical embrace of his same
sex partner.

Ultimately, the commercial’s surprising narrative twist can be read as a humorous act of
resistance. For Butler, acts of resistance “might be understood as repetitions of hegemonic forms
of power which fail to repeat loyally and, in that failure, open possibilities for resignifying the
terms of violation against their violating aims” (124). While a gay audience would pick up on
certain hidden signs, like the house beat of the club music, the absence of women or the alley’s
vague resemble to New York’s meat packing district, most consumers experience the
homosexual reveal as a humorous shock. Despite the difference between their interpretive filters, both gay and straight consumers can relish the humor of this twist because of its disobedience to the Atlas formula. Yet, how does violation factor into this expression of resistance? In her discussion of interpellation, Butler focuses heavily on the concept of transgression. Because the hail originates from a policeman, she assumes that his call functions as a form of punishment. After all, the individual would not attract the policeman’s attention unless he violated a law. Atlas’s hail was certainly directed toward a heterosexual, male consumer base. However, he could not stop women and homosexual men from hearing this same hail, since the advertisements saturated the print media market. Therefore, the ideology of masculinity within these ads contained subtle reprimands that marginalized these populations. The overt disapproval of weakness and effeminacy attests to this idea. The muscular body, then, was constructed as the rightful property of heterosexual, middle-class men.

In this clever act of resistance, the Vigorsol gum commercial dissociates manhood from the middle-class male body and locates it in the narrative construction of discourse. Since narratives serve a way to construct temporality, this shift attempts to explain masculinity as the product of time. The attempt to locate gender exclusively in temporality, versus bodies, marks a critically queer gesture in this study. Many prominent queer theorists have already made significant inquires into the subject of queer time. Of particular note is Judith Halberstam’s *In a Queer Time and Place*, which attempts to define gender in terms of structuring and organizing time. However, her interest in this topic first appeared in her previous book, *Female Masculinity*. For instance, in the introduction, she argues that “masculinity… becomes legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white male middle-class body” (2). Halberstam’s use of the word legible connotes a process of writing and inscription. More broadly, she refers to a range of
discursive processes that upholds male masculinity by repudiating alternative versions of it. However, temporality surprisingly escapes her analysis. Combining Bergson’s zones of indetermination with Judith Butler’s theory of performativity introduces temporality as a defining feature of the inscription process, and provides a context for resistance to and appropriation of masculinity within physique transformation scenes. Through the temporal fold in which before and after images can stand side by side, or even occupy the same panel, the formative power of time is no longer attached to the space of the body.

In this way, temporal compression draws attention away from an internal, embodied notion of masculinity and towards the inscription processes constituting those bodies as gendered. Such a shift coincides with Judith Butler’s interrogation of the interior, stable gender core in *Gender Trouble*. Drawing from Foucault’s theory of panopticism, Butler argues that gender differences do not result from an interior psychological core, but from “the disciplinary production of the figures of fantasy… on the body’s surface”(184). Here, *figures of fantasy* refer to signs that are inscribed onto the body and read as the manifestation of an internal gender core. As the Vigorsol gum commercial makes manifest in its confusion of the muscular physique’s signification, these bodily signs are always contestable. Because they require reiteration and the passage of time to anchor them to a particular meaning, these signs become free-floating signifiers of an embodied masculinity. Even more, the mass proliferation of the muscular physique actually predicated this symbolic confusion as early as 1950. Christopher Nealon devotes an entire section to this topic in his landmark book, *Foundlings*. In a chapter entitled, “The Secret Public of Physique Culture,” Nealon explores how representations of the exposed, muscular body fueled boarder anxieties between hetero and homosexual communities. For instance, he states, “As a consumer culture began to spread through television commercials and
comic book advertisements, it prompted concern that perhaps in the midst of the craze Americans were encouraging a body cult that was as much about men desiring men’s bodies as it was about an unspecified ‘public’ wanting to get in shape” (113). Particularly meaningful is Nealon’s use of the phrase, “in the midst of the craze,” which captures the potential for disruption that intrinsically emerges from performativity. In other words, the power in mass proliferation was messy and uncontrollable. The magazines appealed to fitness minded Americans, but also closeted homosexuals looking for pornographic material. Because the muscular physique could mean different things to different people, the body could no longer be viewed as self-evident. Rather, its signification is linked to a broad web of social processes.

While this particular physique transformation scene demonstrates how resistance operates on the narrative level, it does not reveal how individual subjects can function as agents of resistance. In another contemporary physique transformation scene, a woman appropriates the fantasy of masculine time in order to rearticulate the ideology of hegemonic masculinity. In 1996, the animated television show, *The Incredible Hulk*, introduced the She-Hulk in an episode entitled, “Doomed.” The show ran for two seasons and was eventually renamed, *The Incredible Hulk and She-Hulk*, due to the increasing popularity of the hulk’s female counterpart. In this episode, Bruce Banner, the scientist who transforms into the aggressive muscle-bound green monster, seeks the assistance of his cousin and best friend, Jennifer Walters. Together they flee from a hoard of villains bent on capturing and controlling the hulk. Even though Bruce directly seeks Jennifer’s help, her involvement in any confrontation is severely limited. True to the Atlas formula, Jennifer functions as a narrative prop against which the hulk demonstrates his sense of hypermasculine bravery and strength. This arrangement changes when Jennifer is fatally injured and captured by Dr. Doom, a crossover villain from the *Fantastic Four* series. Bruce Banner
soon reverts back to human form and seeks out Jennifer in Doom’s secret layer. There, he uses his own blood to perform an emergency blood transfusion on his cousin. However, by following her to the secret lab, Bruce walks directly into a well-planned trap. Using Jennifer as a distraction, Doom stealthily implants a mind control device on the back of Banner’s neck, granting him full control of the Hulk’s devastating power. While the subservient Hulk is forced to destroy the nation’s capital, Jennifer experiences her own hulk transformation.

However, Jennifer’s physique transformation scene is different from Bruce’s because it more accurately depicts the fantasy of masculine time. For example, right before he changes into the hulk, Bruce voices concern about the consequences of the transformation. For instance, when his eyes and skin begin turning green in this episode, he screams, “Not now! Not now!” This fearful reaction no doubt stems from the fact the Bruce completely loses himself after the transformation. The hulk operates on pure rage and aggression and traces of Bruce Banner are invisible when the hulk takes over his being. Whereas physique transformation emerges as a curse in Bruce’s narrative, Jennifer embraces it as a gift. As her body transforms, she moans in pleasure and delivers such exclamations as, “I’m feelin’ good!” and “Feels like somebody’s lighting my fire.” The scene becomes even more overtly sexual when her hips buck and break the restraint around her waist. Recall from the Atlas ads that the weakling stands in front of a mirror admiring his muscles immediately after the transformation. The she-hulk’s transformation prolongs this narcissistic moment into an extended sensation of autoeroticism. Even more, Jennifer can fully enjoy the benefits of her hulk transformation because, unlike Bruce, she never loses her identity. Using her increased muscularity and strength to launch an attack on Dr. Doom, Jennifer makes quips about her “Kelly Green abs of steel” and her inability to feel pain. After defeating several henchmen and temporarily disabling Dr. Doom, the she-hulk convinces the
Hulk to destroy the mind-control device. Thanks to the radiation in Bruce’s blood, Jennifer satisfies the demands of hegemonic masculinity. Like the hero of the Atlas ad, she uses her muscles to defeat the foe, protect her loved ones and restore order to the American public.

This demonstration of female masculinity would not necessarily coincide with Halberstam’s critical investigation of the topic; however, one construct does not necessarily negate the other. For Halberstam, female masculinity is not a mutated version of manhood, but a more authentic expression of masculinity. Unlike heroic masculinities, she argues, female masculinity does not rely on the assistance of props. In Jennifer’s case, her masculinity derives from an injection of radioactive blood, the same prop supporting the hulk’s heroic masculinity. However, her reaction to the contamination breaks with convention. She receives the strength, size and aggression of heroic masculinity, but channels these qualities in her own unique way. Here, female masculinity presents a more compelling version of masculinity through rearticulation. This form of appropriation refuses to locate masculinity explicitly within the male body, and suggests that other subjects, including women, can better fulfill the social and cultural obligations of masculinity. In contrast to Halberstam’s model, Jennifer’s recognizes the props of heroics masculinity and then owns them.

For this reason, the she-hulk’s rearticulation of masculinity is linked to Jennifer’s sense of individual agency. Commenting on the agency of subjects, Butler explains, “‘I’ draws what is called its ‘agency’ in part through being implicated in the very relations of power that it seeks to oppose. To be implicated in the relations of power, indeed, enabled by the relations of power that the ‘I’ opposes is not, as a consequence, to be reducible to their existing forms” (Bodies That Matter 122-123). Butler uses the pronoun, I, to stand in for any given individual. By substituting our subject, Jennifer, for this, I, Butler’s notion of empowerment through implication becomes
more lucid. From the start, Jennifer is implicated in a treacherous power struggle between the hulk and Dr. Doom, which relegates her to the role of a marginal prop. Her unexpected physique transformation changes this dynamic in many ways. She obtains the element of surprise, since Dr. Doom has already discounted her as a threat to his plan. As the victim of accidental exposure to radiation she shares the same narrative as Bruce. However, her version of the hulk is mentally cognizant and quick witted. When she first faces Dr. Doom in hulk form she proudly states, “Dr. D, you helped turn me into one seriously cheesed-off she-hulk.” Clearly, Jennifer not only recognizes her implication in Dr. Doom’s plan, but also thanks him offhandedly. His attack necessitated the blood transfusion that turned her into the she-hulk. By underestimating her and relegating her to the margins, he facilitated his own demise in her rearticulation of hulkdom.

This physique transformation scene not only extends masculine construction to the female sex, it also furthers our understanding of zones of indetermination. Traditionally, the hulk transformation enforces an individualistic and embodied version of physique transformation, since the gamma radiation that predicates the metamorphosis only resides in Bruce Banner’s body. His character is often plagued with the loneliness associated with enduring such a curse. Also, the fact that the hulk emerges from his body reinforces this sense of self-solidarity. When Bruce transfers the radiation to Jennifer through a blood transfusion, the viewer remembers that the hulk’s origin comes from an external influence, radioactivity, not from some innate predisposition. In this sense, the zone of indeterminate is something that can be transferred from one individual to another, just like the inculcation and inscription of meaning on bodies. The power of external influences and processes cannot be ignored in the case of the she-hulk. Though the radiation repeats its effects on Jennifer’s body, it does not do so loyally. Even more, it only
takes one removal from its embodied source for repetition through infection to rearticulate and redirect its power.

By moving towards an infection model of zones of indetermination, this final physique transformation scene breaks from a linear temporal framework. Even in Butler’s theorization of performativity, the linear trajectory of interpellation remains intact. In fact, the accumulation of citational hails depends upon such a linear construction. As time passes, the hails are stored in the past where they accumulate weight as a stockpile of images used to organize present perception. Yet, in a zone of indetermination, any number of trajectories becomes possible based on what connections are drawn between images. The interjection of some external force, be it radiation or gum, charges these dynamic moments with the assistance of physique transformation. Once the individual develops a muscular body, he or she discovers that their perception of the present has changed because images from the past can be mobilized in new ways. A world of possibilities opens to the individual after he or she develops muscles. What is most important is that subjectivity allows for such intervention. Butler’s term for the fissured nature of subjectivity is chiasmic. For her, subject formation is never fully complete. Through the effect of performativity, discourse seeks to cover the gaps and fissures it creates with the illusion of uniformity. However, at any moment, these dynamic openings threaten to emerge and change the material arrangement of power. Subjects of the physique transformation scenes utilize these chiasmic openings in order to reconstitute their subjectivity and direct the formative power of the hail back at the figure of authority.
CONCLUSION:  
The Present and Future of Masculine Time

By now, the basic character of masculine time has been charted across history and within a small sampling of cultural artifacts. While so much still remains uncovered, the work here provides a foundational understanding of masculine time’s discursive and representational forms. For instance, the rhetoric of physique transformation from the early twentieth-century illustrates the ideological nature of masculine time. Later, advertisements from the middle of the century shaped this rhetoric of expectation into visual narratives, which depended upon theoretical constructs of homogenous time. Interpellation explains how the constitutive power of these advertisements translated into the material realities of the male consumer’s own subjectivity. Lastly, modern physique transformations scenes illustrate how formulaic constructions of masculine time can be manipulated and appropriated by those seeking to resist and appropriate hegemonic masculinity. In all three phases of masculine time’s cultural evolution, fantasies about temporality, particularly the future, provided an opportunity for subjects to overcome their past and reinvent themselves in the present. However, this investigation hardly claims to have exhausted this topic. Even today, the character of masculine time is changing along with new developments in the relationship between masculinity and muscularity.

A century after the rhetoric of physique transformation first emerged in American culture, a media frenzy surrounding steroids renewed interest in the conflation of muscularity with masculinity. Beginning in the early 2000s, investigations into the use of performance enhancing drugs undermined the demonstration of masculinity in major league baseball. Also, in 2000, *The Adonis Complex*, one of the first investigations into male body image disorders appeared on the *New York Times* Bestsellers list. This impressive piece of pop psychology
warned the American public that unrealistic body ideals arising from steroid use are injurious to male self-esteem. Rumors of celebrities on steroids also abounded in tabloids. In a surprisingly short time, Tobey Maguire and Christian Bale added incredible amounts of muscle mass in order to play iconic heroes of American manhood in Spiderman (2003) and Batman Begins (2005), respectively. In today’s media, the muscular body generates a significant amount of anxiety. Unlike previous generations that revered this body type for its associated masculine qualities, modern Americans are concerned about the psychological and physical danger involved in the pursuit of muscul arity.

Nonetheless, the muscular body still retains a cultural stronghold over the aesthetics of masculinity, mostly because Americans misplace the blame. Without fail, the media targets steroids as masculinity’s public enemy. This rhetorical maneuver makes the problem tangible and somewhat controllable by isolating the threat within a material substance. Yet, a more abstract and elusive problem still plagues American masculinity: the misrepresentation of temporality. Though time can be measured and quantified, its construction remains invisible. Unlike the essence of a chemical substance, the materiality of time can only be seen as a secondary effect. For instance, time registers on the body as a steady increase in height, the onset of secondary sex characteristics at puberty and the development of wrinkles. For fitness-minded men, the slow development of muscle size and definition marks another way to gauge the effects of time. In this light, steroids are nothing but a guaranteed method for speeding up the temporality of bodily development? As the well-documented history of physique transformation scenes attests, this temporal fantasy is hardly unique to either steroids, or this time period. By focusing on performance enhancing drugs and ignoring its own misrepresentation of temporality,
the media safeguards the valorization of muscularity. The pursuit of this ideal only becomes a problem when it leads to self-destructive behaviors.

Even more, steroids not only manipulate the progression of time, but also redefine its content, since every person fills time with his own unique life narrative. Ideally speaking, an athlete would turn to steroids in order to improve his performance, thereby increasing the chance that his achievements will be documented and valorized. In Hollywood, physique transformation leads to memorable roles in high-grossing films. For the average man, steroids afford the opportunity to emulate these and other models of masculinity. Unfortunately, representations of physique transformation mislead American men into thinking that dramatic improvements to their bodies, their life narratives and their sense of masculinity can happen instantaneously. This illusion sustains the temporal fantasy of masculine time- that idealized masculine life narrative, which is immediately assessable through physique transformation. It is masculine time, and not the addictive chemical effects steroids, that seduces men with such benefits of muscular development.

The moment has arrived to recognize the influence of masculine time both in America and across the globe. Already, the muscular ideal has influenced masculine aesthetics in non-western countries. Consider the 2003, science-fiction/fantasy film, *Koi... Mil Gaya*, translation, *I’ve… Found Someone*. This award-winning Bollywood picture depicts the story of a mentally handicapped man named, Rohit, who instantly becomes more muscular and subsequently more masculine with the help of an alien visitor. Before the transformation, Rohit behaved like a child, failed to attract women and cowered away from male bullies. While the alien improves all of Rohit’s faculties, his display of muscularity receives the most dramatic attention. Before confrontations, Rohit flexes his newly acquired biceps for all to admire. Even when showcasing
his other abilities, such as a heightened intellect and agile dance moves, his sleeveless shirts expose the musculature in his arms, while the tight fabric reveals the definition in his torso. Post-physique transformation, Rohit successfully demonstrates his manhood in all the areas in which he formerly failed. In this way, the American fantasy of masculine time carries over into the world of Bollywood via the adoption of the muscular ideal.

As masculine time follows imperialistic paths into non-western cultures, its power will be a contested force. As the brief history of physique transformation demonstrates, this fantasy can be constricting or liberating depending upon the style and direction of its appropriation. Conceiving of manhood as a matter of temporality turns the muscular physique into a free-floating signifier of an embodied masculinity. On one hand, this symbolic power can uphold tradition notions of white, middle-class masculinity, as in the case of *Koi... Mil Gaya*. On the other, marginalized populations can access and reinvent this model of masculinity, as demonstrated in the Vigorsol gum commercial and the she-hulk transformation. One must never forget that the fantasy of masculine time is tied to agency over the body and time. When physique transformation extends into non-western cultures through the cultural mediation of imperialism, masculine time becomes entwined with the temporal implications of progress. From a purely positivistic perspective, masculine time provides an opportunity for people to reinvent society through a strategic chain of effects, in which agency over one’s body alters ideologies of gender and complicates masculinist narratives of progress.
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