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Bubbles & Squat – did Dionysus just sneak into the fitness centre?

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A Danish fitness chain recently introduced a new concept called Bubbles & Squat. Here, fitness training is combined with free Champagne and music. In this paper, we examine this new way of bringing parties, alcohol and physical culture together by exploring the possible meaning of it through existential philosophical analysis. We draw in particular on Nietzsche's distinction between the Apolline and the Dionysiac, as well as his account of great health. On this basis, we analyse Bubbles & Squat as a case of Dionysiac intoxication, excess and ecstasy sneaking into contemporary Apolline fitness culture. In the last part of the paper, we raise the question if adding parties and bubbles to fitness training may, perhaps paradoxically, be healthy for the participants in an existential sense because it contributes to existential balance between the Dionysiac and the Apolline. We conclude that the philosophical framework presented in this paper can contribute to a new understanding of a general physical cultural phenomenon that the case of Bubbles & Squat represents.

Keywords: Fitness training, existential philosophy, physical culture, Dionysus, festivity, alcohol

In Kafka's (1952) novel *A hunger artist*, the narrator begins by noting a decline in the interest of spectators towards the tremendous ascetic performances of hunger artists. As a result, towards the end of the novel, a young panther replaces the hunger artists in the cages, where the great achievements of fasting once attracted the audience. This wild and energetic animal immediately catches the interest of the spectators. It carries freedom and a joy of life streams with passion from it, as it leaps around in the cage that had been dreary for so long.

This image can illustrate an apparent shift in contemporary physical culture. In Denmark, a new fitness chain opened in 2016. It is called Repeat, and on their website, they present it as 'A new breed of fitness. Metropolitan environment. Flexible terms & prices. Join the revolution.'¹ As part of this fitness revolution, they introduced a new concept in 2016 called *Bubbles & Squat*, where fitness training is combined with free Champagne and a live DJ. It is now a monthly event and Repeat also made a New Year's Eve edition of the concept, where they invited their members to 'make your last training in 2016 a party!'² In 2017, this fitness revolution has evolved into similar events such as *Cocktails & Kettlebells* with free cocktails, *Drink Pink* with free rosé wine and an *Appreciation Party* with a free bar, lots of champagne, live DJ, sushi, barbers, hairdressers, a tattooist and an after party at a local nightclub.

At first sight, it may seem like an absurd and ridiculous new hipster-phenomenon, where popular culture distorts the otherwise healthy fitness practice. However, it has been very well received by the members of Repeat (over 200 people participated in the appreciation party). Like the panther in Kafka's novel, these joyful and bubble consuming party people seem to represent a new and different kind of drive and energy than the ascetic self-enhancing and self-forming work that commonly takes place in fitness centres (Markula & Pringle, 2006). This paper aims to explore this new approach to fitness by means of existential philosophical analysis.

The way events like Bubbles & Squat mix parties, alcohol and music with body culture appears to represent a more widespread phenomenon in contemporary societies. The American fitness company *Lifetime* offers similar events such as *Cycle and Champagne*, *Ignite the Night* and *Bootcamp & BBQ*³, and an article in the Washington Post recently called the intersection of alcohol and fitness the newest fitness trend.⁴ Alcohol is also integrated into other kinds of bodily practices. For example, the combination of yoga and beer seems to attract some interest. A Bieryoga studio in Berlin describes on its webpage: 'BierYoga is fun, but it's no joke – we take the philosophies of yoga and pair it with the pleasure of beer-drinking to reach your highest level of consciousness.'⁵ Also, in the last couple of years related phenomena such as the Beer Mile, craft beer races and various wine road races have spread. An example of the latter is the *Chardonnay Run*, an American 5K wine racing series, which has be-

come popular with wine races in five major cities in 2016. Another is the *Virginia Wine Country Half Marathon* - which carried the heading *Run. Sip. Explore.*⁶

The relationship between festivity, alcohol and physical culture has been analysed from a range of scientific perspectives, ranging from medical and physiological, over historical and sociocultural, to ethical and moral analyses. From a medical perspective, the harmful effects of alcohol are well described today. There is scientific evidence that alcohol is detrimental to physical performance as, among other things, it reduces endurance and impairs motor ability and judgement (O'Brien & Lyons, 2000). Hence, alcohol arguably disrupts the striving for excellence, which is commonly conceived as a central part of doing sports.

However, historical and sociological analyses have shown that sport and physical culture have involved (and still involves) various festive dimensions and alcohol. In a historical perspective, Eichberg (2009b) has argued that physical culture before modern sport was a culture of festivity. In premodern Europe competitions, games, dancing and other physical activities were a part of religious festivals and seasonal celebrations that involved music and alcohol consumption. So from a historical perspective, modern sport has grown out of festive culture. But with the genesis of industrial society, the link between sport and popular festival dissolved and sport became a more independent sector dominated by achievement and rationalisation (Eichberg 2009b). The festive dimensions did, however, not vanish entirely. It has remained and developed in the 'underground' of sports cultures, for example in sport club parties as well as in commercial events, such as marathons.

The persistent sport-alcohol relationship has also been studied from a sociological perspective and in this field, most studies have been directed towards the problematic aspects of the relationship (Zhou, O'Brien, & Heim, 2014). A 2014 special issue on sport and alcohol in the *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* presented dominant sociological perspectives on the topic. Here sport-related drinking was analysed with a focus on (a) alcohol consumption among fans, (b) drinking after doing sport (also called the 'third half-time'), (c) the (media's) valorising of heavy drinking in the context of sport, (d) alcoholism among sportsmen and women and (e) how sports-based interventions can serve as a vehicle for social change in relation to alcohol misuse (Palmer, 2014).

Within the philosophy of sport, Carwyn Jones (2011, 2015, 2016) is to our knowledge the only scholar who has considered and analysed the relationship between sport and alcohol. He has analysed this primarily from a medical and ethical perspective to argue first in a 2011 paper for the responsibility of sport athletes to exhibit good character and virtues by avoiding (in particular) excessive alcohol consumption. In a 2015 article, he discussed alcohol and drug addiction in connection with doping. Here, he described a potential performance effect, drawing on a case of an athlete who experienced how 'the alcohol and drugs, because of their

psychoactive properties, did something for him; they calmed his soul and produced some sort of safe feeling' (Jones, 2015, p. 258). In his 2016 book, Jones argues that sport and alcohol have become inextricably linked and that sports play a substantial role in the legitimization of excessive drinking. Jones focuses on the responsibility of sporting heroes to act as good role models by moderating their use of alcohol, and he problematises the use of sport for promoting alcohol through sponsorship and the alcohol-tolerant ethos which characterises many sports cultures.

We acknowledge of course that there are many good reasons for highlighting the problems with the sport-alcohol relation, but in our attempt to better understand the meaning of the declared 'fitness revolution', which combines festive dimensions and alcohol with fitness training, we wish to pursue a different analytical approach. As an alternative to the sociological and ethical analyses of sport and alcohol, many of which are based on medical insights regarding the potential physiological harms of alcohol, we wish to perform an existential philosophical analysis of Bubbles & Squat to, hopefully, come closer to understanding how it can make sense to the participants. Our analysis can, moreover, contribute to understanding the apparent popularity of these events, as well as similar phenomena in contemporary body cultures. In our philosophical examination, we will seek to adopt the method of thinking in contradictions that Eichberg (2009a) has proposed in his analysis of fitness culture. Fitness cultures are diverse, changing and contradictory, he argued, and therefore we should consider fitness cultures in the plural. In our case, the way fitness parties combine fitness and exercise with festivity and alcohol plainly contradicts the dominant values and ethos of contemporary exercise culture. Fitness centres are commonly perceived as pure spaces with a homogenous focus on healthy ways of exercising (Markula & Pringle, 2006). Here, the new body cultural mixture of festivity, alcohol and training, which Bubbles and Squat is an example of, can indeed look like a social and human decline, where an unhealthy and problematic ingredient has sneaked in on the otherwise healthy fitness exercises. However, judging by the reception of the events among participants, and the way similar phenomena appear to emerge, the novel mixture of alcohol and physical culture seems to be attractive and meaningful. So instead of dismissing it as an absurd sell-out of healthy values or social ethos of exercising, we wish to cast a fresh philosophical look at the apparent contradiction it represents and explore new philosophical grounds for understanding the experienced meaning of it. On this basis, the last part of the paper discusses the case from a broader perspective of health.

Existential analysis of Bubbles and Squat

Our analysis will build on the existential philosophy of Nietzsche (1999) and in particular his analysis of two coexisting human drives: the Dionysiac and the Apolline. Apollo was the god

of light, forms and surfaces, representing dimensions of rationality, structure, control and mastery (Graf, 2009). Dionysus was the god of festivals and life's carnivalesque exuberance, representing dimensions of joy, cheerfulness, communality, irrationality, instinct, ecstasy and intoxication (Seaford, 2006). The two describe opposing forces of nature, but they are not binary opposites. As Nietzsche (1999, pp. 27-28) stressed, they are intertwined dialectically and are complementary to each other in 'reciprocal intensification' with the wild and chaotic Dionysiac drive as primary and fundamental, from which the Apolline emerges to provide order and make it manageable. Nietzsche took this distinction from arts and aesthetics and applied it to human life and culture. He saw the proper balance of the two forces as an ideal to strive for. In his analysis, Western culture since Socrates has submerged, repressed and weakened the creative, instinctual, amoral and wild Dionysiac energy, as it has been one-sidedly Apolline with an unhealthy focus on the logical order and stiff sobriety (Wicks, 2017, pp. 11-12). It was against this background that Nietzsche advocated for a cultural rebirth through resurrection and fuller release of the Dionysiac energies of primordial creativity and joy in existence. He saw the (re)discovery of the Dionysiac energies as a renewing of bonds between human beings, and nature reconciled with humankind (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 18).

In the fitness context, the Apolline drive describes rational ways of giving form to one's body. In Apolline terminology, contemporary fitness centres are populated with self-sculpturing and image-making fitness people, driven by dreams of the healthy and/or beautiful body. In modern societies, the Dionysiac contrast to this is commonly reserved to other contexts and institutional settings, for example the discotheque, festivals, clubs or other venues that host the wild and intoxicated ecstasies related to festivity, alcohol, music and dance. However, with Bubbles & Squat, we seem to see a new way of combining the two energies, with the emergence of new excessive, cheerful and lustful fitness people, driven by the intoxicated and enthusiastic desire for ecstasy and self-forgetfulness. Thus, taking the two forms of energies into the context of fitness culture, the case of Bubbles & Squat can initially be analysed as a balancing release of Dionysiac energies in a fitness culture, which is commonly an almost exclusive expression of Apolline drives. It is against this analytical background we ask if Dionysus just sneaked into the fitness centre. To analyse this further, and to examine how this may contribute with new meaning for the 'party fitters', we will focus on three key features of the Dionysiac: *intoxication, excess and ecstasy*. For each of these, we will discuss how they can be seen as a contrast to ordinary fitness culture, and how they may contribute to *the existential balance* between the Dionysiac and the Apolline.

Intoxication

The most apparent Dionysiac dimension related to adding champagne to the fitness mix is intoxication. At first sight, the introduction of intoxicating alcoholic drinks to fitness training appears irrational and mad. This intuition may not be completely misguided. Indeed, it may be an essential part of the reason why the events are attractive. It can help us understand the meaning of drinking champagne while performing squats, because irrationality, madness and 'desire for destruction' (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 235) are central features in Nietzsche's understanding of the Dionysiac.

A common symbol for the Dionysiac energies is the panther and tiger, and Nietzsche also described the Dionysiac intoxication as a way for our alienated and subjugated nature to be reconciled with her lost son, humankind, in a primordial unity (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 18). Thus, alcohol can, for better or worse, bring us closer to human nature, and this may provide insight into how the experience of tipsiness from the toxic drinks in the fitness centre can be experienced as meaningful.

This element of intoxication can be seen as a contrast to the way fitness cultures are commonly associated with cleanliness to support a healthy lifestyle. In most fitness centres you find special energy drinks and protein bars, the content of which target specific physiological needs when training. There are also particular diets associated to various physical cultures, such as relaxing and cleansing herbal teas in yoga studios, raw food and healthy juice sold in cross-fit studios, and detox products and programmes in fitness centres. In this context, the Dionysiac intoxication related to alcohol contradicts and possibly balances the dominant striving for cleanliness.

Excess

Another Dionysiac dimension of Bubbles & Squat is the experience of *excess*. Nietzsche (1999) contrasted the Dionysiac energies of pleasure and excess with the Apolline moderation through limits and measure. Dionysiac excess opposes and transgresses the Apolline 'artificially dammed-up world founded on semblance and measure' (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 27).

The party aspect of Bubbles & Squat can be seen to represent the wild exuberance of Dionysus, as it speaks to the pleasure, sensuality and passions of participants. Contemporary fitness culture and the institutionalisation of it in centres has in many ways reduced lively and playful human movement, with elements of surprise and sociality, to a stiff sobriety of fixated movement and rational training programmes (Eichberg, 2009a). These commonly consist of mechanic exercises, dominated by external goods and functional (e.g. aesthetic and metabolic) aims (Howes, 2016; Markula & Pringle, 2006). In this context, bubbles and music

can contribute to suspend or annul the Apolline measure and moderation. Like Dionysus brought carnivalesque disorder into the Greek cities and disrupted their securely ordered and well-arranged daily city life (Graf, 2009, pp. 11-12), the fitness parties appear to bring an overabundance of sensuality and emotional energies into fitness centres and disrupt the discipline and control of rational training.

Nietzsche (1999, p. 40 and 129) also contrasts Dionysiac excess with the repressive ideals of Christian asceticism, performed as self-renunciation to deny the passions of the flesh. The Dionysiac element of passionate excess can thus, in the context of contemporary fitness culture, provide a means of resistance against both moderation and measure, as well as ascetic self-optimising through strict discipline and control.

Ecstasy

A final Dionysiac element is *ecstasy*. The Dionysiac energies represent an ecstatic disorder, in contrast with the individuated order of the Apolline. Ecstasy is related to self-forgetfulness and loss of individuality. By introducing parties and alcohol Bubbles & Squat can allow participants to transcend themselves towards others and come closer to what Nietzsche described as Dionysiac self-abandonment. 'Dionysiac stirrings' awakened by narcotic drinks can 'cause subjectivity to vanish to the point of complete self-forgetting' (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 17). It can, thus, renew the bonds between human beings, as the Dionysiac drive tears apart the Apolline deification of individuation (*principium individuationis*) (Nietzsche, 1999, pp. 18-26).

In events such as Bubbles & Squat, this can occur as alcohol and music dissolve the boundaries between participants. Fitness training here becomes a social activity where participants meet and engage with other people. The events invite people to have a good time together, rather than conducting an individual training schedule consisting of isolated exercises, with headphones on, and a desire to be done with it. In the fitness context, Dionysiac ecstasy and self-transcendence can, thus, describe a contrast to the individuation of fitness training and the self-surveillance involved in the quest for the ideal body (Markula & Pringle, 2006).

At the same time, the ecstatic loss of individuality can be an ingredient that contrasts the self-awareness, related to the Apolline image-making or self-sculpturing fitness person who dreams, to use the words of Nietzsche (1999, p. 15) of 'the delightfully proportioned bodies of superhuman beings.' Nietzsche (1999, p. 120) also wrote about Apollo that 'Beauty is his element, eternal youth his companion.' This Apolline drive related to the beauty of semblance can, in the fitness context, describe the occupation with outward appearance governed by dominating body images and ideals.

Seeing the fitness parties as an alternative to this can be a way of understanding how they can be attractive and meaningful. With bubbles, the self-conscious monitoring may be supplemented by ecstasy and sociality. The focus of the event can thereby contribute to an experience of lustful self-transcendence, where the ecstatic party-fitter can provide a counterweight to the aesthetic and bodily self-awareness of self-sculpturing fitters striving for beauty to show off (e.g. on Instagram).

Can bubbles be healthy?

From this relatively straightforward and mostly descriptive analysis of the phenomenon, we want to raise the question if adding festivity and bubbles to fitness training may, perhaps paradoxically, be healthy for the participants in an existential sense, as it contributes to existential balance between the Dionysiac and the Apolline. To venture the argument that parties and alcohol can be healthy may appear contradictory. In that sense, it represents the spirit of the Dionysiac, which in Nietzsche's (1999, p. 30) analysis was precisely the embodiment of oppositions and the incarnation of a primal contradiction. It requires, of course, an initial clarification of the concept of health.

A medical understanding of health focuses on biology to determine if a person is healthy or not. This theoretical approach is naturalistic and biostatistical; it rests on concepts of biological function and statistical normality, and the principle that health is the absence of disease (Boorse, 1997, p. 6). From a medical perspective, a reasonable argument against events such as Bubbles & Squat would be that alcohol use carries significant potential adverse effects and is thus not healthy for the physical body (O'Brien & Lyons, 2000). The WHO (2014, pp. xiii-xiv) have stated that the harmful use of alcohol is a component cause of more than 200 disease and injury conditions in individuals and that in 2012, about 3.3 million deaths or 5.9% of all global deaths were attributable to alcohol consumption. Thus, from a medical perspective, it is clear that healthy diets and physical exercises can improve physical health, whereas alcohol has toxic effects on organs and tissue.

Nietzsche advanced a view on health that is very different from the medical perspective and which transcends the duality of health and disease. In *The Gay Science*, he argued that 'the concept of a normal health, along with those of a normal diet and normal course of an illness, must be abandoned by our medical men.' In fact, 'there is no health as such' (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 116). Rather, 'there are innumerable healths of the body' and therefore 'Deciding what is health even for your body depends on your goal, your horizon, your powers, your impulses, your mistakes and above all on the ideals and phantasms of your soul' (Nietzsche, 2001, pp. 116-117). It was on this basis he coined the notion of *great health* (*Übergesundheit*), which he took himself to incarnate. He suffered from terrible physical health but

wrote ‘I am well aware of the advantages that my erratic health gives me over all burly minds’ (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 6). This kind of health does not rest on biology and is not the result of physical activity or exercise. It is a form of existential health that is unleashed as superabundance, a life-affirming manner of being, and it is ‘stronger, craftier, tougher, bolder, and more cheerful than any previous health’ (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 246). He also related this great health to superhuman well-being and benevolence, which is a peculiar, seductive and dangerous ‘ideal of a spirit’ that plays with and indeed challenges existing norms and morality (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 247).

Interrogating the meaning of health in the exercise science literature, Markula & Pringle (2006, p. 51-71) argue that it is dominated by a narrow definition of health informed by medical and physiological science. This has contributed to provide evidence for the relation between improved physical fitness and the prevention of various diseases, and this knowledge has been used to prescribe scientifically correct fitness programmes, where a healthy body equals an illness-free body. A similar reductive and limited understanding of health has recently been reported to dominate young people’s knowledge and view of health, fitness and physical activity (Harris et al., 2018)

Against this background, we wish to question if mixing festivity and alcohol with fitness can, from an existential stance, be considered healthy? We will not challenge that the physiological health concerns are valid from a medical perspective. We want to interrogate if the existential understanding of health can throw new light on the case of Bubbles & Squat. Can this phenomenon be interpreted as the rise of new superhumans, who play with common understandings of health as they cheerfully oppose the common striving for cleanliness and self-discipline in contemporary health-oriented fitness culture? And could the festive consumption of alcohol alongside exercise sessions, in light of this, be seen as a healthy practice?

Balancing intoxication and cleanness

In recent years we have seen a tendency where dietary and exercise behaviour develops into addictive and pathological patterns. The phenomenon of clean eating has become popular during the last 10 years, and for some, the striving for cleanliness can tip over into pathological forms of self-control. The clinical term for this condition is Orthorexia Nervosa. It was coined by Bratman in 1997 and describes ‘a pathological obsession with healthful eating’ (Dunn & Bratman, 2016, p. 12). It is an emerging and indeed paradoxical phenomenon in contemporary western culture, where diets intended for health reasons become a form of eating disorder that leads to malnutrition. Orthorexia is not (yet) a clinical diagnosis, but there has been a growing interest in the condition amongst clinicians and researchers (Dunn & Bratman, 2016).

In light of these tendencies, it appears that the cheerful intoxication at the 'Bubbles & Squat' events may not just be a bad thing for the participants. For some, it may even be experienced as a refreshing and relieving alternative to the sometimes fanatic diets, detox programmes and clean eating regimens, which tend to aim at an abstract and unattainable ideal of health. To be sure, we do not want to argue for parties and alcohol as a cure for severe pathological cases of orthorexia. However, from an existential perspective, it appears sound to suggest that the fitness parties may contribute to nurturing an existential balance between the clean and intoxicated.

Balancing excess and discipline

In contemporary fitness culture, discipline and control are considered valuable traits that are essential for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Markula & Pringle (2006) analyse how 'health-related fitness', for example in the practice of exercise prescription, contributes to instrumentalise this form of physical activity, as it involves 'a tendency to build disciplined, normalised bodies through its requirement of continual improvement evidenced by specific fitness test results. To obtain physical fitness meant engaging in regular, ever increasing amounts of exercise' (p. 70). The Crossfit culture has especially embraced this, exemplified by inspirational slogans such as *rather the pain of discipline, than the pain of regret*. However, the question is if disciplined and self-optimising training schedules could sometimes benefit from the different energies of fitness parties? In recent years there has been a tendency where exercise behaviour develops into pathological and addictive patterns, the clinical term for which is *exercise addiction* (Lichtenstein, 2014; Lichtenstein, Christiansen, Elklit, Bilenberg, & Stoving, 2014). Exercise addiction describes a condition of perfectionist striving and overindulgent concerns for body and performance, where exercise becomes the essential thing in life. It can have negative consequences such as overuse injuries, withdrawal symptoms and interpersonal conflicts.

Again, we do not want to argue for parties and alcohol as the cure for extreme pathological cases of exercise addiction, but reflecting on such cases can serve to illustrate that things may not be as straightforward as ordinary discourse sometimes suggests. Discipline and control can be seen as virtues of fitness in the sense that too much of it would be an unhealthy vice. From an existential perspective, the elements of pleasurable excess and sensual exuberance related to Dionysiac fitness parties may help to balance the disciplined striving for control.

Balancing ecstasy and individualisation

A related aspect that is interesting to reflect on concerning health is the Dionysiac self-forgetfulness and loss of individuality that can be part of the ecstasy in fitness parties. The study mentioned above of young people's knowledge and understanding of health, fitness and physical activity, reported a 'healthism discourse' to be evident (Harris et al., 2018). *Healthism* is a term coined in 1980 by Robert Crawford to describe the moralisation of health among middle-class Americans, and how issues of health were internalised to become an individual responsibility. More recently, he has used the term *new health consciousness* to describe 'an emerging ideological formation that defined problems of health and their solutions principally, although not exclusively, as matters within the boundaries of personal control' (Crawford, 2006, p. 408). The pursuit of the good life, Crawford argues, has been reinvented as an individual quest for living more healthfully and getting in shape. This privatisation of health is articulated in metaphors for achieving health, which in Crawford's analysis include self-control (vs. letting go), self-discipline (vs. enjoyment), self-denial (vs. pleasure) and willpower (vs. not worrying).

Crawford is very critical to this individualisation of health, and he describes a range of consequences of this new health-consciousness. It is, for example, accompanied by a 'danger-consciousness', which he describes as 'a medically informed, vigilant and sustained awareness – a monitoring of the life-world for toxins, an ear turned to medical and governmental health advisories and, increasingly, a lifelong regimen of medical supervision' (Crawford, 2006, p. 403). The irony of this kind of health-consciousness is that it often leads to a downward spiral of control and anxiety where 'the more important health becomes for us, the more insecure we feel' (Crawford, 2006, p. 403). This downward spiral towards healthism can, thus, help us understand why detox programmes and clean eating regimens have become popular.

Another consequence of the new health-consciousness is the loss of social life, which is also a consequence of both orthorexia and exercise addiction. Crawford argues that when the achievement of health becomes a private matter, it is something 'won by individual effort, professional advice and consumer products rather than participation in social life' (Crawford, 2006, p. 405). Here, people strive for well-being as an end in itself, rather than engaging in other superior communal ends, and sometimes the individual struggle for health and well-being is accompanied by a loss of shared values and social life. In a health perspective, this is contradictory, as studies have shown that the influence of social relations is comparable with well-established risk factors for mortality (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010). In light of this, it seems plausible to suggest Bubbles & Squat as a healthy alternative to regular fitness. Festivity is, as Eichberg (2009b, p. 232) has argued, 'an existential meeting where human

beings create a fugitive experience here and now.' So, if festivity and alcohol in the fitness centre can make participants forget themselves and contribute to ecstasy and sociality, then it may provide a healthy existential balance by bringing participants together in ways that can revitalise human bonds and stimulate new social relations.

Bubbles and great health

The contemporary health issues discussed above reveal that the medical health arguments for ordinary (i.e. Apolline) fitness, and against Dionysiac fitness parties such as Bubbles & Squat, may not be so straightforward as often assumed. From an existential perspective and in light of Nietzsche's account of great health, one might even venture to propose that even if we acknowledge the potential physiological harms of alcohol consumption, there may be some health benefits from drinking champagne in the fitness centre. Nietzsche surely did not reflect on anything like modern fitness culture, but it is tempting to suggest that his answer to medical arguments, as well as other critical remarks against Bubbles & Squat, could be that it comes from those who:

(...) whether from lack of experience or from dullness of spirit, turn away in scorn or pity from such phenomena, regarding them as 'popular diseases' while believing in their own good health; of course, these poor creatures have not the slightest inkling of how spectral and deathly pale their 'health' seems when the glowing life of Dionysiac enthusiasts storms past them. (Nietzsche, 1999, pp. 17-18)

Concluding and cautionary remarks

In this paper, we have drawn on Nietzsche's existential philosophy, to seek an understanding of a new way of mixing fitness with festivity and alcohol. We have analysed how the Dionysiac elements in the case of Bubbles & Squat may be experienced as attractive and meaningful, due to the way intoxication, excess and ecstasy can provide a balancing alternative to Apolline elements of common fitness culture. We also engaged in reflections concerning health issues to argue that this existential balance can, perhaps paradoxically, contribute to more healthy ways of engaging in fitness training. Now, to balance our analysis as well, we want to conclude by highlighting some limitations and adding a few words of caution.

First, to strengthen our analyses and sustain the arguments it would be relevant to follow up with empirical studies that can provide detailed descriptions of the participants' experiences with Bubbles & Squat. Without such first-person accounts, it could, for example, be argued against our analysis that the contrasts between the Dionysiac and Apolline are rather two sides of the same story that may even be mutually strengthening. Our descriptions of

ecstasy and the social dimension as a contrast to the individualisation of fitness may be proven wrong if participants experience the events as an opportunity for showing off one's ideally sculptured body, rather than a loss of individuality and self-awareness. Empirical studies could also throw critical light on whether the events might exclude specific groups of people such as elderly or people who, for example for religious or medical reasons, do not consume alcohol.

Second, our analysis has not engaged with obvious ethical concerns related to mixing alcohol and fitness. Neither have we considered the risk of injuries or other possible dangers of drunkenness. While our aim has by no means been to advocate for excessive drinking during a workout or other forms of physical activity, we have explored the possible constructive meaning of adding an alcoholic ingredient to fitness training. An argument against this could be that the Dionysiac energies should emerge from within in the activities themselves rather than by adding festivity and alcohol in special events. Torres (2006) has argued that the Dionysiac consciousness reverberates in the Olympic creed and that the Dionysiac mode of being-in-the-world should be part of participating in sport, for example, expressed through the joy of effort and a lusory attitude. He draws on Coubertin to describe 'the passion, ardor, self-indulgence, exhilaration, intoxication, and sense of drunkenness brought about by letting oneself be captured by sport' (Torres, 2006, p. 247). The same argument could be made concerning fitness training, rather than festive dimensions and alcoholic drinks the Dionysiac energies should emerge from within the activities. It is, however, beyond the scope of our analysis to evaluate the potential of fitness training to provide similar experiences as being engaged in sport. We have confined ourselves to analyse the ways in which festivity and alcohol seem to provide new opportunities for finding meaning in fitness training. By exploring this and outlining a philosophical framework for understanding it, we hope that our analysis can contribute to a new and valuable perspective that can guide further investigations into different Dionysiac phenomena and configurations in fitness cultures as well as other contemporary physical cultures.

Notes

1. <https://www.repeat.dk/repeat>
2. Posted 28 December 2016 on <https://www.facebook.com/pg/repeatfitnessdk/>
3. <https://www.lifetimefitness.com/active-events.html>
4. https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/wellness/the-weird-intersection-of-booze-and-fitness-could-be-big-business-for-both-sides/2017/03/28/9b36ba84-036c-11e7-b1e9-a05d3c21f7cf_story.html?utm_term=.8f24e3902065
5. <http://bieryoga.de/english/index.html>
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