

Body Culture

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ABSTRACT

In this article Author considers notion “body culture” – its role and place in the theory and practise of the specific kind of human movement activity related to variously conceived sport and physical culture. He researches this issue from the historical and contemporary point of view. He presents large theories on body and culture of Norbert Elias, Frankfurt School, phenomenology, Michael Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu context of justification. He analyses expression body culture also in the light of philosophy, sociology, anthropology, ethnology, psychology, education, linguistic, theology, politics and democracy assumptions.

KEYWORDS

body, culture, movement activity

Body cultures in meeting – a colonial case

Body culture consists of body cultures. And body cultures meet in history.

We start with an introductory case. In the beginning of the 20th century, the people of the Mentawai islands off the west coast of Sumatra (Indonesia) entered for first time into contact with the Dutch colonial power, which dominated Indonesia in the early 20th century. Living in longhouses and clans along the rivers in the equatorial rainforest, the Mentawaians had kept to their (in colonial jargon) so-called ‘Stone-Age’ culture. The “mild savages”, as they were also called by Westerners, lived in an “original affluent society”, without villages, without chieftains, but rich in festivities and shamanic rituals. When the Mentawaians encountered colonial authorities, this isolation was broken and led to processes of cultural learning and astonishment. An old Mentawaiian told of an episode with a Dutch military officer:

“But once we were not content with him. He said that we should come down to the coast and take bows and arrows with us. There they had prepared all very beautiful and waited for us on a large place. We got a meal and drink, and then they took a coconut and asked us to shoot after it. We did so, and when one of us hit the nut they cheered and screamed, as if we had hit an ape and not a coconut. At the end we received our reward and could go home again. But what was not correct in our opinion was that we did not receive equally. Some received a lot, and others did not receive anything at all. We all became a little bit angry in our hearts. But what should we do? They are as they are...”

When asked who those had been who received more, he answered:

“Yes, this is exactly what we did not understand. It was purely coincidental. It was quite independent from which clan they came.”

The story is about a misunderstanding. The Dutch had the idea to involve the Mentawaians, who were famous for their art of shooting, in a festivity in honour of the Dutch monarchy. By bodily activity there should be built a bridge between the cultures (in a similar way, it is often said today that sport expresses an elementary, objective and universal body language, which – being far from linguistic language – may serve as an ideal medium of understanding across borders and of bridging between peoples).

In real life, however, the encounter developed in another way, and this is what the old Mentawaian remembered. The well-intentioned meeting began friendly with festive decoration and a meal. It turned into a ridiculous event as the Dutch cheered in a – for the indigenous guests – incomprehensible way about the arrow hitting a coconut. And it ended with an insult when the Dutch officer distributed the sports rewards. The prizes were given according to the principle of achievement, and this conflicted with the artificial balance between the clans, which was basic for Mentawaian social relations. To give somebody more and someone else less, according to their shooting results, neither corresponded to the egalitarian pattern of this stateless society nor to the complex relations between the different longhouse clans. Bow-and-arrow shooting as a Mentawaian art of hunting and bow-and-arrow shooting as a Western sport were two fundamentally different activities.

The case casts light on the complexity of bodily activity, body language and body culture. And it tells us about how relevant body culture is for the understanding of society and cultural diversity.

Furthermore it tells us about the interlacement between Western history of sport and non-Western history. History is not only the genesis and change of the one mainstream we call ‘sport’ (a standard work on this perspective: Guttmann 2004). It is also the history of ‘non-sports’ in thousands of Asian, African, Indigenous American and Pacific cultures. Their particular ways (in German: *Sonderwege*) throw light on what has been the *sonderweg* of Western sports. Through body culture – and in this case especially through the clash between body cultures – cultural diversity becomes visible.

1. Work on the history of body culture so far

The attention of cultural and social studies to “the body” started in the 1970s in a near-explosive process. Sociologists, historians, philosophers and anthropologists, scholars from sport studies and from medical studies suddenly met in talking about “the return of the body” or its “reappearance” (typical: *Die Wiederkehr des Körpers*, Kamper/Wulf 1982). The term “body culture” soon follow to express the new interest in the body .

In trying to describe the history of this term and the related field of knowledge, however, one has to distinguish between three different lines of development: the line of ‘classical’ theories about the culture of the body, the history of the word “body culture” itself, and the recent profile of discourse as well as the changes in social practice, which produced or promoted the new attention. These three lines lead to different historical phases.

1.1. Large theories on body and culture

When the attention to “the body” and to body culture had found its word, scholarly attention turned back to sociologists and philosophers who had earlier made studies in this field. These were – since the 1920/30s – especially Norbert Elias, the Frankfurt School, and some phenomenologists. Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu built bridges towards the new studies of body culture.

The German-Jewish sociologist **Norbert Elias** (1939) unfolded the first sociology which placed the body and bodily practice in its centre. He started with a sociological analysis of table manners from the Middle Ages to French court society in Early Modernity. Elias described how people used knife, spoon, fork, and plate in a more and more formalized way. Involving practices around handkerchief and disgust, night gown and nakedness, bathroom and toilet as well as palace and garden architecture, Elias built on the basis of this material the theory of an over-all “process of civilization”, which was linked to Western state formation, the centralisation of power and the strengthening of social interlacement. Later, Elias (1986) incorporated sport into this theory of civilization and postulated a progressive, though sometimes irregular process of civilizing manners from ancient practices of chase to modern competitive sports. Furthermore, Elias (1989) studied the culture of the duel in Wilhelminian Prussia in order to throw light on certain particular traits of the German *sonderweg*. Through all these studies in body cultural change and difference, Elias aimed at a *Menschenwissenschaft*, which combined socio-genesis with psycho-genesis and explicated particular figurations between human beings. Though the radicality of his approach was rarely fully realised among his disciples, who gave it some structural-functionalist and evolutionist undertones, the figurational sociology became productive especially in the field of sport studies (Dunning et al. 2004). Elias’ concept of process of civilization received, however, also a harsh critique from the side of a comparative anthropology of bodily practices (Duerr 1988/2005).

The **Frankfurt School**, also known as the Critical Theory, started in the 1920s as a cooperation of German-Jewish sociologists who combined Marxist and Freudian approaches. Bodily practice soon came into the focus, when for instance Siegfried Kracauer compared the scene dancing of the Tiller girls, a troupe of entertainment industry, with the capitalist rationalisation of industrial work. Mass ornaments of the commercialized bodies and mass production were related to each other. Walter Benjamin followed up by reflecting about the aesthetization of the bodily display in Fascist politics. In what is regarded as the main work of the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno (1947) described the Western “dialectics of enlightenment” as including a sort of underground history of the body. The living body (in German: *Leib*), which had importance for the lord-servant relations in societies of slavery and feudalism, lost its living quality under capitalism and became a dead body. Now the corpus (in German: *Körper*) functioned as a commodity and private property on the market. Against the conservative cultural criticism, which dreamt of a return to the living body, against the aesthetic illusions of modern advertisement and against Nazism, which combined body aesthetization with violence, Horkheimer and Adorno underlined that there was no way back to the non-alienated *Leib*. Furthermore the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* pointed to the Jewish tradition, which avoided measuring the human body, because this measurement was applied to the dead corpse for the coffin. This critique could be read as a critical comment on sport. Later on, a younger generation of the Frankfurt School followed in the tracks of Adorno giving birth to the Neo-Marxist sports critique (Rigauer 1969) and developing alternative historical approaches to movement culture (Lippe 1974). Also historical studies about the body in industrial work (Rabinbach 1992), in transportation (Schivelbusch 1977), and in Fascist aesthetics (Theweleit 1977) as well as a philosophy of body and space in history (Sloterdijk 1998/2004) had their roots in this critical approach.

At the same time, philosophical **phenomenology** began to pay attention to the body. The

German philosopher Helmuth Plessner (1941) studied laughter and weeping as fundamental human expressions. The French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) placed the body in the centre of human existence: It is through bodily existence that the human being is in the world and experiences the world. By focusing on the body as source of understanding, love and identity, Merleau-Ponty conflicted with Jean Paul Sartre, who saw the body as an object of disgust, shame and alienation. But more influential became the conflict which Merleau-Ponty displayed between the body-fundamentalist position of phenomenology and the traditional body-mind dualism of René Descartes. In another way, the philosopher Gaston Bachelard approached the bodily existence via a phenomenology of the four elements – fire, water, air, earth – and of space, starting with studies about the “psychoanalysis of fire” (1938). Most of the phenomenological studies had their intellectual origin in the scientific studies of the German poet Johann Wolfgang Goethe, whose work *Zur Farbenlehre* (1810) can be regarded as the first phenomenological research. Goethe’s phenomenology of the colours was built up against the mathematical-reductionist approach of Newtonian science – and it included historical studies on the production of colours.

Based on phenomenological traditions, the French philosopher **Michel Foucault** (1975) undertook deep studies in the configurations of knowledge during the Renaissance and the ‘classical age’ of Baroque in order to approach the post-1800 society of modern ‘development’ and panoptical control. His studies approached the body by analyzing the history of military discipline and the panopticon as a mechanism of control. The modern body moves in an “archipelago of prisons” and is subjected to what Foucault called the biopolitics of power. This approach became especially influential for sport studies in body, space, and architecture (Vertinsky/Bale 2004). But it also inspired critical studies in the disciplined body of gymnastic and sport (Vigarello 1978, Barreau/Morne 1984, Vertinsky/McKay 2004).

While Foucault’s studies in bodily discipline focused on the top-down strategies of power, the French Sociologist **Pierre Bourdieu** directed his attention more towards bottom-up processes of social-bodily practice. He started by studying the Kabyl Berber people in Algeria, their houses and life practices, before entering into studies among different social classes in Paris and France. On this basis, Bourdieu (1966/67) developed the influential concept of habitus. Habitus is a sort of incorporated pattern, which became social practice through diverse forms of taste and distinction, through the display of the body – and through sports. Side by side with economic capital, the social habitus could be understood as a sort of “cultural capital”. Some of Bourdieu’s disciples, such as Jacques Defrance (1987), applied these concepts to the history of sports and gymnastics.

Also in the works of other ‘fathers’ of modern social thinking, ‘the body’ was recently discovered as being at least an underground category – in Karl Marx’ reflections on the “basis” of human practice and social relations, in Max Weber’s analysis of the Protestant and capitalist “secular asceticism”, and in Marcel Mauss’ observation of “body techniques”.

1.2. The word and concept of “body culture”

Though the named ‘classical’ theories were centred about body and culture, they did not normally use the term “body culture” itself. This concept had another terminological origin, being derived from movement practices at the beginning of the 20th century. Between 1900 and World War I, new bodily practices suddenly spread across Europe and America, taking the collective name of “life reform” (German *Lebensreform*). Reform of clothing and reform of nurture played together with new bodily activities, which constituted a sort of third sector alongside gymnastics and sport. The main fields of this ‘third way’ of movement culture were nudism, rhythmic-expressive gymnastics, yoga and

body building (Wedemeyer-Kolwe 2004). Though these practices were very diverse, they found a comprehensive term in the German word *Körperkultur*, in English “physical culture”, in French *culture physique*, and in Danish *kropskultur* or *legemskultur*. This concept of body culture contained – besides health and functionality – strong elements of aesthetical display of the body, which shifted according to the tendencies of Art Deco, Expressionism, New Objectivity and New Classicism (see the illustrations in Fischer 1928). Furthermore, body culture and life reform gave birth to an early and for a long time singular study in the history of bodily positions and movements, a history of the foot posture written by the Austrian reform gymnast Karl Gaulhofer (1930). The classical article of the French anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1934) about the “techniques of the body” may be seen in this context, too.

German Socialist workers’ sport gave a prominent place to the concept of *Körperkultur*, while Nazi sport gave priority to *Leib* and *Leibesübungen* and detested *Körperkultur* as being materialistic, decadent and Jewish. It was probably by way of the German Socialist “body culture”, that the concept entered into the theory and practice of Russian Socialists under the name of *fiskultura*. After the revolution of 1917, *fiskultura* became an alternative to bourgeois sport, uniting the revolutionary fractions of more aesthetically oriented Proletkult and more health oriented hygienists. Under the dominance of Stalinism, however, the contradictory terms were united under the formula “sport and body culture”. This continued in the Soviet bloc after 1945. *Körperkultur* was, thus, re-imported into the German Democratic Republic, where the official review of sport sciences bore the title *Theorie und Praxis der Körperkultur*, and the sports university in Leipzig was called “German High School of Body Culture” (DHfK).

During all these transformations, the concept of body culture was generally used in the singular. Though at a closer view both historical change and cultural diversity became visible, one did not yet talk about body cultures in the plural.

When the 1968 student movement revived Marxism in Neo-Marxist forms, the concept of “body culture” – *Körperkultur* in West Germany, “somatic culture” in America – entered into the sports-critical discourse, and its alternative accents were sharpened again. This is how the Danish term *kropskultur* obtained a new actuality during the 1970/80s, used by the sports-critical school of Gerlev Sports Academy (Korsgaard 1982, Vestergård 2003). In Finland, the concept *ruumiinkulttuuri* attracted similar attention (Sironen 1995, Sparkes/Silvennoinen 1999). *Quel corps?* was the title of a critical review of sports, edited by the French Marxist educationalist Jean-Marie Brohm in 1975-1997.

Among some European scholars, this was supplied by the term “body anthropology”, as in the framework of the French-Danish-German *Institut International d’Anthropologie Corporelle* (IIAC 1987 ff; Barreau/Morne 1984, Dietrich 2001 and 2002). The review *Stadion, Journal of the History of Sport and Physical Education* (Cologne 1975 ff) chose for its title the terms *Sport und Körperkultur* in German, and *Sport et culture physique* in French. Outside Europe, the Japanese sociologist Satoshi Shimizu established a *Centre for the Study of Body Culture* at the University of Tsukuba.

1.3. Innovation in studies of body culture

As mentioned before, the concept of body culture has met with a new scholarly interest in the human body since the 1970s. This innovation happened as a cross-disciplinary process.

From the side of **philosophy**, one began to talk about “the return of the body” with some ‘post-modern’ undertones (Kamper/Wulf 1982). The body in sport and Fascist aesthetics found philosophical-historical interest (Gebauer 1988), while an Aristotelian philosophy, critically directed

against the Kantian rationalism, paid attention to bodily feelings and emotions in sport like pain, hubris and schadenfreude (McNamee 2002/06).

In **anthropology**, the classical article of Clifford Geertz (1972) about Balinese cockfighting received worldwide attention, and during the 1970s, an anthropology of the body was drafted (Blacking 1977). Susan Brownell (1995) delivered important body-cultural studies of sport in China, and G. Whitney Azoy (2003) showed by analysis of the Afghan game of Buzkashi, how power and violence was embodied in the situation of playing.

In **ethnology**, the Tübingen School in Germany around Hermann Bausinger contributed with studies among others about upright posture (Warneken 1990). Danish ethnologists launched the body-near concept of life-form analysis (Højrup 1983), and the Swedish “cultural analysis” approached modernity as a transformation of bodily practice (Frykman/Löfgren 1979). The Birmingham school of the *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies* (CCCS, 1964-2002) obtained broad international attention with its studies of youth cultures, sport and rock music.

Though **sociology** was traditionally focused on institutions and abstract societal processes, several sociologists have followed in the footsteps of Elias, Adorno, Foucault and Bourdieu. Brian S. Turner (1984) and Chris Shilling (1993) presented overviews of the body in society, and the Department of Cultural Sociology in Copenhagen gave birth to several body-near studies.

Psychology had some problems extending its perspective from the bodiless soul or psyche towards the body. The German Communist psychiatrist Wilhelm Reich was the first, during the 1920/30s, to give the body a central place in therapeutic practice and in psychoanalytical theory, especially “body armour” and orgasm. He used this for a sort of body-political critique of Fascism. His work was rediscovered after 1968 and led to new forms of therapy, especially in California, at the Esalen Institute and in the new field of Somatics. In Finland and the UK, the body, its subjectivity and its culture was approached via narrative and autobiographic methods (Sparkes/Silvennionen 1999). David B. Morris (1991) presented an important study on the “culture of pain”.

All this influenced the field of **education**. Under the heading of “body anthropology”, educationalists from France, Germany and Denmark cooperated (IIAC 1987 ff) and undertook case studies in traditional games as well as in “scenes” of new urban body cultures (Barreau/Jaouen 1998, Dietrich 2001 and 2002). “Movement culture” became a pedagogical keyword in German pedagogical thinking (Moegling 2001/2). The “non-sportive sport”, play and games, and diverse forms of Sport for All were regarded as an educational challenge for the sport-dominated culture of the body.

In **linguistics**, George Lakoff & Mark Johnson (1980, 1987) discovered the bodily basis of language, the rich world of body metaphors. The linguistic dualism between German *Körper* and *Leib*, between having a body and being a body, which had already been the basis of Plessner’s (1941) findings, was revisited and reconstructed in English using the word-pair body and soma.

Even **theology** contributed. The French Jesuit Marcel Jousse (1974) tried to de-theorize the Christian message by pointing, in an original way, to the bodily narrative, the “living word” as the core of Jesus’ message. The central point of Christianity was not the book, but the bodily gesture, *la geste*.

Among these diverse approaches, **historiography** found rich inspirations for hitherto neglected studies. Whether approaching from a more phenomenological historiography (Nitschke 1989, Dülmen 1998) or from a historical-statistical background (Imhof 1983), the culture of the body became central. The posture of the body (Vigarello 1978) and the bodily display (about tattoo: Oettermann 1979) as well as the bodily movements of transportation, automobilisation, and racing (Schivelbusch 1977, Sachs 1984, Borscheid 2004) found their historians. Links between body history

and political history became visible on the levels of ideas (Hoberman 1984 about right-wing and left-wing body politics), literary imaginations (Theweleit 1977) and gymnastic practice (Vestergaard 2003).

Opposition, resource, recognition – the body discourse and societal practice

It is not yet clear which change in the societal basis of bodily practice may have produced or promoted the new superstructure of research interests centred around body culture. Taking a closer look, different phases and sub-discourses can be distinguished.

The early “return of the body” during the 1970s showed traits from alternative culture and the hippie movement. New Californian-style games spread in practice, and Somatics tried a theoretical superstructure in the spirit of New Age (The magazine *Somatics* was published by Thomas Hanna from 1976 on). In this context of counter-culture, the critique of sports as a “prison of measured time” (Brohm) developed and was enlarged towards a discourse of body culture.

A further body discourse was about sexuality and gender. It had its basis in the feminist movement. This opened it up for the awareness of another type of societal contradictions – contesting the industrial patriarchy.

In other words, the new approach to body culture saw the body as oppositional – and as a field of contradictions. Body culture was a term of resistance.

Soon however, ‘post-modernism’ entered the field. Sharing the critique of system thinking and functionalism, proponents of ‘post-modernism’ joined the discourse of body culture and contributed by paying increased attention to the multiplicity and diversity of body cultures in plural. Postulating the death of the great narratives, however, post-modernism itself produced a new ideology, now under the heading of all that was fragmented, coincidental and erratic – just bricolage. Bodily existence was seen as a world of tastes, group differentiations, and individual dispositions. The body became a matter of choice and construction.

This superstructure expressed how market and health systems had occupied the terrain. On the one hand, the fashionable body discourse was mainly about body shape and body image, about decoration and dressing, about tattoos and beauty surgery. This corresponded to the current state of consumerism and merchandise, telling people about the commodification of the body.

On the other hand, the body discourse became largely colonized by questions of health and illness, curing and hygiene. Recently, excess weight, obesity and nurture have received greater attention. This mirrors alarming changes in the world of capitalist production and alienation.

In other words, the post-modern and constructionist approach to body-culture referred to the body as a resource. Body culture was a world of normalization – and at the same time a supermarket where the human being chooses according to his individual inclinations.

This profile of ‘the social body’ was illustrative, but too narrow. It was the static body – shape and health – that attracted one-sided attention, while the dynamic body in motion was neglected. The discourse about the body as a certain ‘being’ showed marks of reification forced upon it by the powers of production, consumption and reproduction.

What was neglected was the body as a field of dynamic human interaction, of movement – and movement cultures in plural. In movement, human subjectivity develops through bodily dialogue with others. This is where sports, dances and games have their special place. Body culture, thus, emerges as a field where recognition and non-recognition are in conflict.

2. How studies in body culture contribute to wider historical debates

The study of body culture has enabled the study of sport to enter into broader historical and sociological fields of discussion, among others concerning modernisation, civilisation, industrialisation, and colonisation.

2.1. Civilisation, disciplinatio, modernisation

Studies of body culture enriched the analysis of historical change – but with conflicting terms. Norbert Elias (1986) studied sport in order to throw light on the civilizing process. In sports, he saw a line running from original violence to civilized interlacement. Though there were undertones of hope, Elias tried to avoid evolutionism, which since the 19th century postulated a ‘progressive’ way from ‘primitive’ to ‘civilized’ patterns.

Nevertheless, there remained a contrast between the concept of civilization, which had hopeful undertones, on the one hand, and disciplinatio, which had more critical undertones, on the other. The concept of discipline could – following Foucault and the Frankfurt School – be based on the study of sport and body culture, among others the studies of Baroque dance (Lippe 1974), aristocratic and bourgeois pedagogy of the spinal column in the 18th/19th centuries (Vigarello 1978), and hygienic strategies, school sanitation and school gymnastics in the 20th century (Augestad 2003). Military exercise in Early Modern times was a productive field for the body cultural analysis of discipline, too (Gaulhofer 1930, Kleinschmidt 1989).

In the field of sports, a central point of dispute has been the question of whether sport had its roots in Ancient Greek competitions of the Olympic type or whether it was fundamentally modern. While the first was the hypothesis of 19th century Neo-Humanism, Classicism and Olympism, body cultural studies claimed that the patterns central to modern sports – quantification, rationalisation, principle of achievement – could not be dated before the early industrial culture of the 18th/19th centuries (Eichberg 1978, Guttmann 1978). What could be found before modern industrial culture, were popular games, noble exercises, festivities of different character, children’s games and competitions, but not sport in the modern understanding. The so-called Eichberg-Mandell-Guttmann theory about the uniqueness of modern sport became a matter of controversy and was opposed by several historians (Carter/Krüger 1990). An open problem remains the analysis of the body culture of the competitive festivities in Olympia, Delphi, Nemea, Isthmia and other places of Ancient Greece in contrast to modern sports. Anyway, the emergence of modern sport was an eruptive innovation rather than a logical prolongation of earlier practices – a revolution of body culture. This transformation contributed to a deeper understanding of the Industrial Revolution.

What came out of the controversies between the concepts of modernization, evolution, civilization, disciplinatio, revolution etc. was that “modernization” – if at all – can only be thought of as a non-linear change with nuances and full of contradictions. This is how the history of sport (Nielsen 1993 and 2005) and of gymnastics (Defrance 1987, Vestergård Madsen 2003) as well as the history of running (Bale 2004) have been described in body-cultural terms.

One of the visible and at the same time deeper changes in relation to the modern body concerns the reform of clothing in sport and society and the appearance of the naked body, especially in the years between 1900 and the 1920s. The change from distinguished pale skin to suntanned skin as a “sportive” distinction was not only linked to sport, but had a strong impact on society as a whole. The change of appreciated body colour reversed the social-bodily distinctions between people and classes fundamentally. Organised nudism as “naked sport” was an especially visible and radical,

sometimes even sectarian expression of this body-cultural change (Wedemeyer-Kolwe 2004).

Also the history of social and political movements appeared in a new light as soon as they were analyzed under the aspect of body culture. Studies in the literature of German Pre-Fascist “free-corps” have shown how important body and gender were in the formation process of Nazi violence (Theweleit 1977). Differences between the right-wing and the left-wing view of the body have been subjected to detailed studies, which pointed towards a deeper level of politics than just ideology and interest. The right and the left wing differ not only in their relation to ideas like liberty and equality, but also and fundamentally to body-cultural practice and body display (Hoberman 1984). Most of these studies have so far mainly used literary sources, while practices like mass festivities, uniforms and dressing, styles of movement, sport and music still have to be analyzed in connection if light is to be cast on the dynamics of political and social movements.

2.2. Social time

Modern society is characterized by the significance of speed and acceleration. Sport, giving priority to competitive running and racing, is central among the phenomena illustrating the specifically modern velocity (Eichberg 1978, Borscheid 2004, Bale 2004). The historical change from the circular stroll in aristocratic and early bourgeois culture (König 1996) to modern jogging as well as the changes from coach traffic via the railway (Schivelbusch 1977) to the sport race between automobiles (Sachs 1984) produced new body-cultural insights into modern social time. On the basis of transportation and urbanism, blitzkrieg and sports, the French architect and cultural theorist Paul Virilio (1977) developed the provocative terms of “dromology” (i.e. science of racing) and “dromocracy” (power or dominance of velocity) to describe the knowledge and the politics of modern social acceleration. But the concept of social time embraces many more differentiations, which can be explored by comparing time-dynamic movements of different ethnic cultures (Hall 1984).

2.3. Social space

Bodily display and movement always create space – socio-psychical space. Bodily activities have during history changed between indoor or outdoor milieus, between non-specialized environment, specialized facilities and bodily opposition to existing standardized facilities or what was called “sportscape”. In movement, straight lines and the culture of the streamline were confronted with mazes and labyrinthine structures, with patterns of fractal geometry. All these patterns are not just spatial-practical arrangements, they also play together with societal orientations. Under this aspect, the history of panoptical control (Foucault 1975, Vertinski/Bale 2004), the parcellation of the sportive space, and the hygienic purification of spaces (Augestad 2003) has been described. Proxemics (Hall 1966) – the study of bodily space – has a historical dimension.

This is also true for the understanding of ‘nature’. The ‘nature’ of body culture – of outdoor life, naturism and green movement – could in the course of history be a world of liberation and opposition, as in the periods around 1800 and after 1900. But it could also turn into ways of colonization and simulation, forming a ‘second nature’. And it can even be a virtual world, which is simulating people’s senses, a ‘third nature’. Anyway, the study of body culture contributed to a history of cultural ecology.

Body cultural studies also contributed to a differentiation between what in everyday language is often confused as ‘space’ and ‘place’, whose dialectics were clarified by the Chinese-American philosopher Yi Fu Tuan (see Bale 2004). Space can be described in coordinates and by certain

choreographies. Spatial structures can be standardized and transferred from place to place. This is the case with the standardized spatial facilities of sports. The place, in contrast, is unique – it is only either here or there. Locality is related to identity. People play in a certain place – and create that place by play and game. People play the place, and the place plays with the people.

2.4. Industrialization and production

When inquiring more deeply into the origins and conditions of the Industrial Revolution, which in the 18th/19th centuries transformed peoples everyday lives in a fundamental way, the traditional common-sense explanations of industrialization through technology and economy as ‘driving forces’ is shown to be insufficient. Both economic interests and technological change had their basic conditions in human social-bodily practice. The history of sport and games in body cultural perspective showed that this practice was changing one or two generations before the Industrial Revolution itself took place. What had been carnival-like festivities, tournaments and popular games before, became modern sport by a new focus on results, measuring and quantifying records afterwards (Eichberg 1978, Guttmann 1978). Under the aspect of the principle of achievement, there was no sport in ancient Egypt, in ancient Greece, among the Aztecs or Vikings, and in European Middle Ages, though there were games, competitions and festivities. Sport as a new type of body culture resulted from societal changes in the 18th/19th centuries.

The genesis of sport in connection with industrial productivity called to attention the historical-cultural relativity of ‘production’ itself. Studies in the history of “the human motor” and the “mortal engines” of sport showed reification and technology as lines of historical dynamics (Rigauer 1969, Vigarello 1988, Rabinbach 1992, Hoberman 1992). Production became apparent not as a universal concept, but as something historically specific – and sport was its body-cultural ritual.

That societies also could choose diverse ways, was shown by the Japanese relation to the (Western) gun. From the 17th to the 19th century and on the basis of other body-cultural prioritizations inside the ruling samurai class, Japan dropped the gun and returned to the sword (Perrin 1979). The social body culture was shown to be stronger than the ‘logic’ of military weapons technology.

2.5. State, market and civil society – and the trialectics of body culture

Body culture is a field of contradictions. Analysis of body culture has shown that these contradictions are not necessarily dualistic in character (Eichberg 2004).

Under the aspect of reification, state logic subjects the body to power, control, ‘evaluation’, and training of ‘competences’. This is the reification of bureaucratic control and ‘management’, as reproduced in state sports and state gymnastics.

Market logic, in contrast, subjects the body to instrumental use – the body being on one hand a means of production. By bodily practice, human beings produce results in centimetres, grams and seconds or points, as is the case in sport. On the other hand, commercial logic makes the body a target for the appeal of consumption – it implies the reification of the body as a commodity. The body is decorated, dressed, beautified, surgically transformed, ‘bettered’ by prosthetic devices and chemical means. These tendencies can be observed both on the market of professional sport and on the market of fitness.

A third logic alongside public and commercial rationality can be found in civil society with its alternative body cultures as well as traditional movement cultures and popular games. Here, it is not so

much the result as the process that counts. In civil logic, the body is a medium to confirm or contest one's identity – inside and between self-organised and voluntary groups.

The spatial organisation of body culture points in these three directions, too. The public space of body cultures is marked by borders. Inside certain delineations of state borders, body culture is organized both in an inward-directed unifying way and in an outward-directed competitive way, in relation to other body cultures beyond the border. The market does not know these kinds of borders and does not recognize them. Under commercial logic, body models are rather organized and offered in series, differentiated according to different target groups. This is the order of the supermarket. In civil society, the order of body cultures is more 'confused', as body cultural practices follow the principles of self-organisation and distinction. Rationalist philosophers have deplored this as *Neue Unübersichtlichkeit* (Jürgen Habermas 1985 about the "new lack of survey" or "new non-transparency"). The space of sport in its historical development shows different combinations and nuances of these conflicting patterns.

This makes evident that the differentiation between public-political, commercial and civil logics is in some way connected with trialectical relations inside the world of sports (Eichberg 1998, Bale 1996, 2002 and 2004). The hegemonic model of Western modern body culture is achievement sport, translating movement into records. Sportive competition follows the logic of productivity by bodily strain and forms a ranking pyramid with elite sports placed at the top and the 'losers' at the bottom. Through sportive movement, people display a theatre of production.

A contrasting model within modern body culture is delivered by mass sport. In gymnastics and fitness sport, the body is disciplined by subjecting it to certain rules of 'scientific', social geometrical or aesthetic order (Roubal 2007). By rhythmical repetition and formal homogenization, the individual bodies are integrated into a larger whole, which is recommended in terms of reproduction, as being healthy and educative. Through fitness sport, people complete a ritual of reproductive correctness and integration.

A third model is present in festivity, dance and play – it is popular assemblage. In carnival and folk sport, people meet people through festive movement. This kind of gathering is what may give life to the top-down arrangements of both productive achievement sport and reproductive fitness sport. But the body experience of popular festivity, dance, play and game is a-productive in itself – it celebrates relation in movement.

Practices of sport in both their diversity and their historical change, thus, clarify inner contradictions inside social life more generally.

2.6. The body and the people

Body-cultural studies have shown a certain relation between the body and what is called the people or the folk. Play and game, dance and festivity, competition and fight are fundamental for popular culture. Through mock fight, carnival and laughter, people challenged the elites (Bakhtin 1968, Burke 1978, Davis 1994). In and through movement culture, people developed identity: Who are we? The body in movement is an identity marker (Hoberman 1997, Vestergård Madsen 2003). Like one's name and one's life history, the body tells people 'who we are', just as habitus, bodily display and practice mark class identity (Bourdieu 1966/67).

All this questions some dominating assumptions about who 'the people' are, the folk. Like the concept of 'the body', the term 'the people' has become colonized by hegemonic theories, mainly by substantialism and constructivism.

Traditionally, one has tried to define a given people by a certain substance, treating them like a material object. The ‘substantial people’ was objectified by criteria of ‘blood’, language, historical origin, territory, religion, customs, ‘national character’ and inner psychological disposition, state and constitution, common economy, community of communication or whatever.

The substantial view of the folk was opposed by interpretations of folk as an idea. The ‘people’ was said to be nothing but a construction, created by the propagandistic actions of leaders or intellectuals, typically nationalist ideologists. The assumption about the ‘constructed people’ was dominated by elitist connotations: The ‘people’ does not exist in itself, nor does it find itself – it is made from above, as an “imagined community” or an “invented tradition”.

Studies of body and movement culture question this dual pattern (Eichberg 2004). “We are the people!” was a basic saying of democracy since the time of the French Revolution. The call “We are the people!” meant: We are in motion! By reclaiming the street and by festivity, people reclaimed their individual and interacting bodies against ruling elites.

2.7. The so-called “individual” body

Studies in body culture have again and again shown that bodily existence is more than just ‘the body’ as an individual bag of skin and bones, which is under the control of an individual mind. Bodily practice is going on *between* the different bodies. This questions two current types of thinking ‘the individual’ – the epistemological individualism and the thesis of “late-modern individualization”.

The methodological habit to counter-pose ‘the individual’ and ‘the society’ is largely disseminated in sociology. It was fundamentally criticized by Norbert Elias, who underlined that there is no meaning in the separation between the individual as a sort of core of human existence and the society as a secondary environment round about. Society is inside the body. Elias used the paradigm of the waltz in order to demonstrate that an understanding of the dance could not be based on an intellectual strategy starting from the isolated individual. But there was a wholeness in space and time, couple formation and social relations that made the human being co-act together with others. In contrast, the epistemological solipsism treats human existence as if the human being were alone in the world – and were only in a secondary process ‘socialized’ (critically also: Sloterdijk 1998 vol. 1).

Another current assumption is of historical character. It says that individualization during “high” or “late modernity” has replaced all earlier traditions – religion, nation, class – and leaves ‘the individual’ alone with its body. The body, thus, gets a central position as the only fix-point of “self-identity” left after the dissolution of the traditional norms. The individual chooses and makes its own body as a sort of “gesamtkunstwerk Ego” (Ulrich Beck in Dülmen 1998, see also Shilling 1993 with reference to Anthony Giddens).

Body-cultural studies can also test – and challenge – this assumption. They throw light on inter-bodily relations, within which the human individuality has a much more complex position.

2.8. Basis and superstructure

The body is the material basis of human existence. Studies of body culture contribute to fundamental philosophical orientation. On the one hand, the body is a part of human life, which the individual cannot choose freely. On the other hand, the body is not determined from the very beginning. Between the given body on the one hand and intentional body management on the other, body culture develops in a process, which is historical and collective. The study of body culture

throws light on this process and its contradictions between ‘just doing’ and trying to steer and control. People ‘make’ their own body, but they do not make it of their own individual will. People say one thing, mean another – and do something else.

Studies of body culture have shown the different levels of what is called ‘culture’ in human life. *Body culture* can be understood side by side with *symbolic culture*, which consists of the ideas, expressions and meanings of societal life, and with *material culture*, which is the world of human-made things, instruments and technology.

However, symbolic culture, material culture, and body culture do not just range on the same level. Bodily practice is the origin of material constructions as well as the basic reference of language. ‘Understanding’ refers to the upright position of the human being. The ‘standing’ body also tells us about the ‘state’ of the things and about the political state, and the discourse about social ‘movements’ is based on an understanding of human bodily movement.

In this perspective, the study of body culture throws light on the history of philosophical materialism. In the origin of modern materialist thinking, among 18th-century’s encyclopaedists and philosophers of nature, the physical matter (*materia*) was seen as determining the world of ideas. The result was a *physical materialism*. In 19th-century political philosophy, certain modes of production, technological change and resulting conflicts of interest determined the history of institutions and ideologies. This gave birth to an *economic materialism*. If bodily practice is regarded as the basis of social identities, of conscience and historical change, a third, *body-cultural materialism* can be considered.

In this connection, the study of sport, dance and games, of bodily discipline and bodily production contributes with basic research to the history of human society and human philosophy.

2.9. Body cultures in plural

‘Culture’ in singular is an abstraction. The study of body culture is always a study of body cultures in the plural. Body cultures show human life in variety and differences, assimilation and distinction, conflicts and contradictions. This demands a comparative approach to otherness, and this is the way several studies in body culture have gone.

To study culture as cultures was already in the 1930s the approach of the school of Cultural Relativism in American anthropology (Ruth Benedict). Postcolonial studies have taken up this pluralistic perspective again (Bale 1996 and 2004, see also Brownell 1995, Azoy 2003, and Leseth 2004). The fashionable discourse in the singular about “the body in our society” became problematic when confronted with body cultures in conflict and tension.

The plurality and diversity of body cultures is, however, not only a matter of outward relations. There are also body cultures in the plural inside a given society. The study of different class habitus, youth cultures, gender cultures etc. opens the issue up for deeper insights into the differentiation of civil society.

And side by side with the terms of symbolic culture (ideas, meanings, arts) and material culture (things, instruments, technologies), body culture raises the question: What are cultures?

2.10. Movement

The body is not only a certain substance or materiality, as it was and is often treated in natural

sciences. Nor is the body just a sign or construction, as recent theories of constructivism claim. By reducing the body to discourse, meaning, interpretation, symbolic expression, and semiotic patterns, constructionist thinking treated the body as a text, which can be ‘read’. Body culture, however, refers to a third category: practice in movement.

Bodies in movement practice, this is what the study of movement culture is about. However, the concept of ‘movement’ touches upon at least three very different dimensions of human life: bodily movement, emotional movement and social movement.

First dimension: People move in concrete bodily activities like sports and dance, games and meditation, outdoor activities and festivals. To understand bodily movement, the study of body culture touches the theory of practice, praxeology, which casts light on the culture of inter-bodily situations and relations. Many of the existing body-cultural studies have this main focus, both the history of sport (Guttmann 1978 and 2004, Nielsen 1993 and 2005) and of gymnastics (Defrance 1987, Vestergård Madsen 2003, Augestad 2003, Roubal 2007), which constitute two main fields of modern body culture – but not the only ones. On the limits between sports and non-sports, one finds fight, struggle, and martial arts (on the duel: Elias 1989, on festivities of popular boxing: Davis 1994, on Afghan equestrian games: Azoy 2003), running (Bale 2004), and practices of fitness (Wedemeyer-Kolwe 2004). Outside the hitherto defined field of sport, outdoor activities as well as play and game (Caillois 1995, Barreau/Jaouen 1998), dance (Lippe 1974, Midol 1995, Dyck/Archetti 2003) and meditative practices have found historical interest.

Second dimension: People are moved by feelings, emotions and humour. Emotions (i.e. emotions), motives and motivations demonstrate that there is emotional movement – fascination and euphoria, anger and fear, pain and laughter (Bakhtin 1968, Morris 1991). This is what the psychology of social interactions and social relations is about.

Third dimension: People unite in social movements. They meet in associations and peer groups, informal networks and formal organizations. This is what the history of popular life is interested in (Burke 1978), but also the history of Fascism (Theweleit 1977). In this way, the study of body culture contributes to the discovery of civil society and its inner contradictions.

The three dimensions are connected with each other – but how? There is no shortage of studies on the specific fields of body movement, emotional movement and social movements each for itself. What is needed, however, is a new type of comparative synthesis between bodily, emotional and social movement. It is hardly by chance that different languages use the same term for these different levels: movement – *bevægelse* (Danish), *bevegelse* (Norwegian), *rörelse* (Swedish), *Bewegung* (German), *mouvement* (French), *movimiento* (Spanish), and *movimento* (Italian).

3. Future perspectives of body culture studies

3.1. Thick description

The study of body culture begins with empirical description derived from historical sources and/or field observation. Rich in details, sensual, multi-faceted, and multi-dimensional, this living narrative can draw on anthropological traditions, which the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) called “thick description”. As any possible concept is culturally relative, a general definition cannot be the starting point, but analysis starts by a certain phenomenon in its complexity and historicity. The initial case is what in Danish is called “the good story”, i.e. a narrative including the research interest of the researcher and his or her amazement: Wow, isn’t this interesting?!

3.2. Comparison and contradictions

The study of body culture always includes an element of comparison. One given case of bodily practice will always contrast with other practices – for instance called ‘traditional’ vs. ‘modern’ – and serious research raises this spontaneous and un-reflected comparison to culturally reflected understanding.

The comparison of diverse practices is supported by the construction of a terminology of contradictions. This is what philosophical tradition has called dialectical thinking. The trialectical analysis, as sketched above – between state, market, and civil society, between achievement sport, disciplining exercise, and popular festivity – is a non-dualistic version of this dialectical approach. How body cultures can be understood from external conflict became visible in the introductory case from Mentawai/Indonesia.

3.3. Configurational analysis

Though bodily movement may be experienced as a whole, it is the pattern which reveals the inner tensions and contradictions of a given society. That is why the study of body culture has to focus on the configurations of movement in time and space, the energy of movement, its interpersonal relations and objectification. Above this basis, people build a superstructure of institutions and ideas, organising and reflecting body culture in relation to collective actions and interests (Eichberg 1978, Dietrich 2001: 10-32).

The *time* of bodily movement is marked – among others – by contradictions between acceleration and slowness, between living rhythm and mechanical pace, between linear-abstract and irreversible time, between cyclical, progressing and situational time. This clarifies specific tendencies of historical change, as for instance the transformation from the noble exercises of the 17th and 18th centuries with their circulating and formally measured patterns to modern gymnastics and sports with their new patterns of speed and flow.

The *space* of bodily movement is characterized by contradictory elements, too – contradictions between the straight line and the labyrinth, between connection and parcellation of spaces, between geometrical space, identity place and intermediary space. The Foucaultian study of around 1800 on the panopticon as a specific modern way of organising the space of movement and the bodily visibility has shown the societal depth of this analysis, which deserves to be repeated for other periods and societies.

The *energy* of bodily movement can be described by a multiplicity of different atmospheres, radiations, moods and modes of attunement. These have a right of their own in the study of body culture and cannot be reduced to the categories of space and time. The emergence of modern *Spannung* (tension, thrill, excitement) in 18th/19th century boxing at the same time as in criminal literature was illustrative for the shift towards industrial society – as was the significance of laughter in Mikhail Bakhtin’s analysis of social tensions in Renaissance society.

The *interpersonal relations* in bodily movement tell us about power and gender, about winners and losers, about the *You* and the *We* in motion. History of sports has especially been enriched by the attention to gender unbalances in body culture – this has to be followed up in nuanced and non-dualistic ways.

The *objectification* of bodily movement develops in the tension between process and result, between production, reproduction and a-productive encounters in bodily activity. The production of records by modern sports has been a central criteria for the understanding of modern industrial

behaviour.

Above these basic body-cultural processes, the *organisations and institutions* of body culture deserve attention. Traditional sport history has, however, often one-sidedly focussed on the level of this superstructure. The same is true for the level of *meanings and ideas*, which were ascribed to bodily practices. The complex interplay between body-cultural practice and the superstructures of cultural ideas and conscience have to be elaborated in more depth. This may be the main challenge of the concept of body culture to the established sport history.

3.4. Body politics and bodily democracy

The study of body culture has political dimensions. On the one hand, Fascist and other undemocratic body cultures have been built on the basis of sport, gymnastic, military exercise, and violence. On the other hand, democracy can be understood as bodily self-determination and recognition, to which gymnastics and sports contributed in many ways. There are complex relations between the people of movement and the people of democracy.

This made the study of body culture at certain times politically controversial. Power could regard body-cultural research as dangerous or subversive. In 1933, the Frankfurt School was purged in Nazi Germany, and after the youth unrest of 1968 the Critical School – being productive among others in the new sports critique – was again seen as ‘the enemy’. In the Soviet Union, Stalinism ended the *proletkult* project of *fiskultura* and subordinated the critical concept of ‘body culture’ under the practice of state sport. Some research institutes particular active in critical studies of body culture were in recent times closed down or denied further funding by right-wing authorities, as was the case with the Department of Cultural Sociology at the University of Copenhagen in the late 1980s, the famous Birmingham School (CCCS) in 2002, and the Danish Institute of Sport Research (IFO) in 2003.

It is unlikely that the controversial character of body-cultural studies will disappear in future, but it may very well develop in new and unexpected directions. On the global level, the post-colonial meeting between cultures and their demands of recognition tend to result in clashes of body-cultural practices. More than on religious ideas, some forms of Islam focus on body-cultural regulations, from the veil of the female to the beard of the male, from the circumcision of children to the suppression of games, sport, dance and music (Khuri 2001). But also interests in “old popular games” have arisen in the Arab world as well as in East Asia and have led to some quest for body-cultural studies. Afro-American successes in certain sports have produced controversial bodily identifications with the ‘Black athlete’ (Hoberman 1997). Practices like Indian yoga, African dances, and Afro-Brasilian capoeira have contributed to what was called an “exotization of Western body cultures” (Nitschke/Wieland 1981). The renaissance of the particular in body culture gave rise to critical questions about the Western-colonial ethnocentrism of Olympic sport (Brownell 2007).

The questions arising from these political tensions and post-colonial innovations challenge the established knowledge of sport history. The question is no longer only about ‘sport’ as it had been established and taken as given during Western industrial modernity and as it was projected back into its prehistory. The question is about the relation between sport and non-sports – dances, games, festivities, fighting arts, running techniques, outdoor activities, bodily meditation – i.e. about the broader field of body cultures. The introductory case about the colonial meeting of Mentawaiian bow-and-arrow shooting and the subsequent misunderstanding it generated, remains as valid as ever.

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