

# The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory

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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.

“Body culture is a field of contradictions. Analysis of body culture has shown that these contradictions are not necessarily dualistic in character”

- H. Eichberg 2004

The collective phenomena of **births, aging, and mortality** have become the **academic monopoly of historical and mathematical demography** (where the moral and social significance of these events is subdued in favor of exact calculation).

What one might term the theodicy of the body is equally neglected even in the sociology of religion (Turner, 1983).



For the individual and the group, the body is simultaneously an environment (part of nature) and a medium of the self (part of the culture).

The body is crucially at the juncture of human labor on nature through the medium of writing, language, and religion and thus critically at the juncture of the human species between the natural order of the world and the cultural ordering of the world.

The body lies at the center of political struggles. While it can be argued unambiguously that the physiology of men and women represents a major difference (in reproductive functions), gender identity and gender personality have to be inserted into physiology by socialization into specific roles and identities.

in the modern world of consumerism, we can also think of two medical conditions – bulimia and anorexia nervosa – as two individualized forms of protest which employ the body as a medium of protest against the consumer-self.

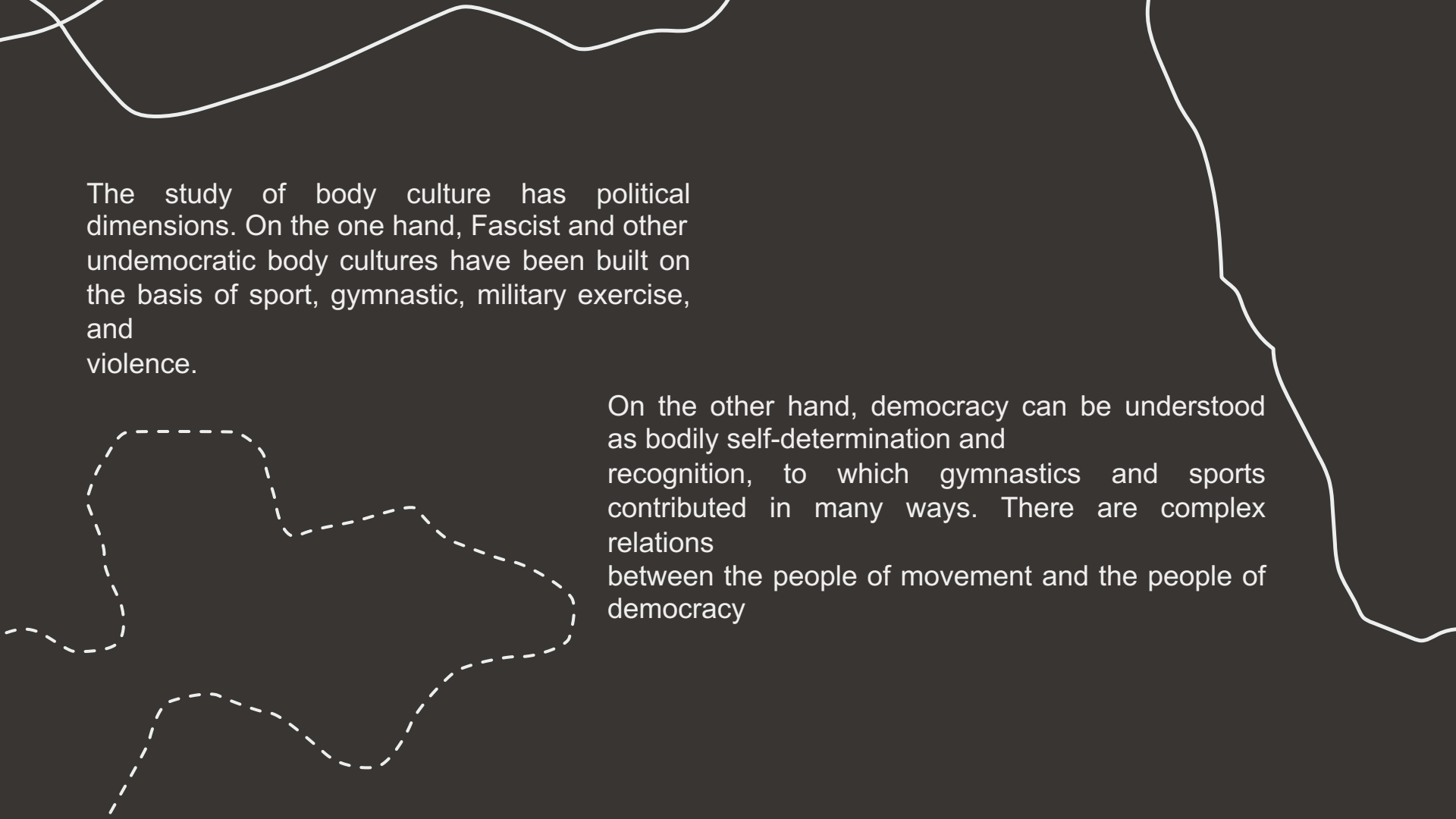
Table 8.2

| Culture | Nature           |
|---------|------------------|
| Orgy    | Asceticism       |
| Bulimia | Anorexia nervosa |


If **orgy** and **asceticism** are culturally mediated and social activities, **bulimia** and **anorexia nervosa** are individual solutions to social problems and they are more closely dominated by the routines of physiology.

While both bulimia and anorexia are individually selected solutions to familial crises, they have unintended physiological consequences over which, by definition, the individual has no control.





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

## REFERENCES

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