

Arnold
Schwarzenegger—
Interdisciplinary
Perspectives
on Body and Image

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Introduction: He'll Be Back.
On The Cultural Significance of Arnold Schwarzenegger

"If you were an anthropologist trying to understand contemporary America," Michael Blitz and Louise Krasniewicz write in the introduction to *Why Arnold Matters*, "you would do well to pick Arnold as your starting point" (ix). We agree.¹ It is impossible to contemplate the meaning of Arnold Schwarzenegger without discussing the multiple overlapping topics and themes that have defined the United States over the past fifty years: immigration and the American Dream, body and gender, Hollywood and the star system, public images and political campaigns, and California conservatism and the challenge of green politics. In his careers as a bodybuilder, film star, and politician, Arnold Schwarzenegger has managed to become a cultural icon that speaks to all of these aspects of U.S. society. He both has been shaped by and has shaped the discourses that define how we think about American history, culture, and politics. Consequently, studying Arnold Schwarzenegger means much more than studying a famous bodybuilder, actor, or politician; it means studying America.

Despite the fact that he has received surprisingly little scholarly attention, we believe that Arnold Schwarzenegger is of interest to scholars in a variety of disciplines. This volume attempts to show how such a multi-disciplinary endeavor might help us better understand both the Schwarzenegger phenomenon and the society that embraced him.² The

¹ Blitz and Krasniewicz, of course, claim to be "those anthropologists" too (ix). However, while their study is a fascinating biography that provides many valuable insights into the relationship between Schwarzenegger and the culture he is part of while constantly reflecting on the relationship between the biographers and their object of study, their book does not quite live up to its potential. We feel that they focus too narrowly on Schwarzenegger himself, his films, and the 2003 election. Moreover, they do so exclusively from the point of view of cultural studies.

² While there are a number of popular and critical biographies (cf. Leamer;

contributors to this volume come from a wide range of specializations, including history, political science, art history, media studies, film studies, cultural studies, and American studies. Although many of them look closely at Schwarzenegger's life and career, their interest goes beyond mere biography, let alone hagiography. Rather, the authors either regard Schwarzenegger as a synecdoche, as an exemplary case that sheds light on larger developments, or they employ Schwarzenegger as a lens to bring those larger developments into focus.

The essays collected here share more than methodological commonalities, however. Utilizing Schwarzenegger as a means to understand various larger issues in American history, culture, and politics, they also share the same theoretical foundation, namely a focus on the analytical concepts of body and image.³ While earlier generations of scholars perceived the human body to be a natural fact of human existence, most studies produced from the early 1990s onward have stressed the constructed, malleable, and plural character of corporeality.⁴ Only through language, these scholars argue, can we describe and interpret the physical materiality of human bodies. Consequently, discourses of cultural representations of bodies and embodiment have become key to under-

Huger), only film scholars and political scientists have so far shown sustained interest in Schwarzenegger. Even they have not explored the field systematically, however. The former have focused more or less on the *Terminator* films, while the latter have concentrated on electoral politics in California or rather journalistic accounts of Schwarzenegger's politics (cf. Wilson; Indiana; Mathews).

³ That the concepts of body and image are of crucial importance to understand Arnold Schwarzenegger and the discourses surrounding him has been recognized before but never really investigated. For instance, an article published in the German weekly *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* in 2007 began with a reference to Schwarzenegger's body ("Kein anderer Schauspieler hat seine Filme so häufig unbekleidet betreten, keinen Männerpo kennen wir besser. Und unsere Blicke werden gelenkt wie sonst eben nur auf nackte Frauenkörper") and ended with a short remark on his image ("Und bei alldem—das unterscheidet ihn dann doch von den Frauen, die die Kamera so anblickt wie ihn—behält er die vollständige Kontrolle über sein Image") without really exploring their interconnectedness and larger cultural implications (Lueken).

⁴ Cf., among many others, Becker and Schneider; Burroughs and Ehrenreich; Gugutzer, *Body and Soziologie*.

standing how specific cultures conceived of the "body" at various historical moments. Since bodies are culturally constructed, then, they have to be understood as sites of contest on which certain norms, values, and identities are negotiated, challenged, and normalized. Gender roles and gender identities are a case in point, since they tend to be inextricably linked to discourses about bodies. Michel Foucault in particular has called attention to issues of power and knowledge that characterize the ideological processes that construct human bodies. Such processes "discipline" these bodies and frequently perpetuate restrictive gender hierarchies. As Judith Butler has pointed out, language and symbolic or performative practices help construct dichotomous, heteronormative ideas about "feminine" and "masculine" bodies, which appear as seemingly natural and unalterable, even though they are subject to constant contestation and change.⁵ While such a perspective does not question the physical reality of bodies, it insists on the impossibility of making definitive or transhistorically valid statements about them.

Moreover, even though they are subject to discourse, men, women, and children are not necessarily mere victims of discourses of power and knowledge. Rather, they can actively confirm, question, or reject dominant ideas about bodies and gender. Body technologies are of crucial importance in these negotiations. Body technologies include all those materials and practices that help influence the appearance of the human body. Examples would be make up, bodybuilding, plastic surgery, or prosthetics. Within this context, the question of whether such technologized bodies are perceived as natural or unnatural and whether they are perceived as healthy or unhealthy is crucial. In general, bodies that strengthen dominant notions of gender are perceived as natural, while those bodies that challenge these dominant ideas are not (cf. Wesely).

In the United States, the importance of strong and healthy bodies had been a topic of public discourse long before Schwarzenegger arrived on the scene. These discussions were inextricably intertwined with economic, social, and cultural changes in American society. As a consequence of these changes, notions of gender became highly contested. As early as the 1890s, men in particular reacted to modernization, industrialization, and a growing women's movement with rising anxiety over their male identity. Confused over the question of what constituted real

⁵ Besides Foucault and Butler, see Conboy; Medina and Stanbury; and Brook.

men, many Americans sought to ease their fears by strengthening a dichotomous view of masculinity and femininity. Increasingly, male bodies were seen as manifestations of gender identities, resulting in praise for muscular male bodies and disdain for seemingly weak and effeminate bodies and behavior. Overt manifestations of these gender anxieties receded by the 1920s, but they reappeared with a vengeance in the 1970s and 1980s when Arnold Schwarzenegger became a major media celebrity. Prior to the 1970s, bodybuilders like Schwarzenegger had been sneered at as freaks of nature and were frequently seen as homosexuals because of their seemingly effeminate concern with the aesthetics of their body. By the early 1980s, however, bodybuilding and weight lifting had become increasingly popular, and the bulging muscles of Schwarzenegger and some of his peers were admired by amateur athletes and moviegoers alike.⁶

Engaging the complexities of corporeality and gender in the United States, a number of the essays in this volume focus on the ways in which bodybuilding has influenced American culture and on the role that Arnold Schwarzenegger played in this process. Comparing the mass media's attitudes toward the muscular bodies of the two bodybuilders Eugen Sandow and Arnold Schwarzenegger, Simon Wendt's essay "Bodybuilding, Male Bodies, and Masculinity in 19th and 20th Century America: Eugen Sandow and Arnold Schwarzenegger" explores the ways in which constructions of corporeality and gender have changed between the late nineteenth century and the 1970s. While commentators during the 1890s praised the body of the Prussian muscleman Sandow as the epitome of virile masculinity, Schwarzenegger and his peers were belittled and looked at suspiciously. In contrast to the admiring audiences of the late nineteenth century, media comments in the mid-1970s criticized the unnaturalness of modern musclemen's bodies, doubted that bodybuilding was a sport, and questioned athletes' heterosexuality. Bodybuilding only gradually gained acceptance within American society, and, Wendt argues, Arnold Schwarzenegger was responsible for that change in attitude, at least in part. Through the book *Pumping Iron*, a documentary with the same title released in 1977, his advice books, and subsequent roles in such action films as *Conan the Barbarian*, Schwarzenegger was able to debunk various stereotypes

⁶ On these developments, see Green; Park; Kimmel; Dutton; and Dworkin and Wachs.

about the sport and convinced many Americans that muscular bodies were worth striving for. In many ways, Wendt concludes, Schwarzenegger's success both reflected and fueled the cultural changes that took place in American society in the 1970s and 1980s.

In "Visualize Yourself with the Body You Want': Body and Image in Arnold Schwarzenegger's Bodybuilding Guide Books," Danijela Albrecht focuses more closely on the ways that Schwarzenegger himself perpetuated notions of femininity and masculinity in the numerous advice books that he published after his bodybuilding career. In these publications, Albrecht argues, Schwarzenegger used his own life story as an example to impart ideas about how ordinary people could transform themselves and their bodies to attain personal satisfaction and success. His philosophy was closely connected to his life-long quest to attain and live the American dream. Indeed, Schwarzenegger regarded a muscular body that was built according to his philosophy and training regimen as a potential basis for upward social mobility in America. Women, by contrast, were advised to confine themselves to "shaping" rather than building their bodies, since female bodies that were perceived as too "manly" would result in failure rather than success in life. Schwarzenegger thus perpetuated a dichotomous view of femininity and masculinity through his advice literature, cautioning his readers not to challenge traditional notions of gender.

Further probing the challenges that bodybuilding poses to gender hierarchies in America, Michaela Hampf's "What Do the First Arms Signify? An Intersectional Analysis of *Pumping Iron II: The Women*" analyzes the sequel to the documentary *Pumping Iron* in order to demonstrate how an intersectional perspective on bodybuilding can help us better understand the sport's gendered, sexualized, and racialized nature. Released in 1985, *Pumping Iron II*, like its predecessor, concentrates on several athletes who prepare for an important bodybuilding competition. While the film's focus on women at first appears to be a sign of women's liberation, it propagates an image of femininity that does not diverge far from traditional ideals of female beauty, thus echoing Schwarzenegger's advice literature. Complicating interpretation of the film is its focus on Carla Dunlap, the African American woman who won the contest. Hampf suggests that strong black women like Dunlap frequently allow white women to ignore the oppression that African American women face in American society and to neglect their

complicity with white men in that oppression. A closer look at *Pumping Iron II*, then, calls attention to the ambiguous combination of ostensible empowerment and the (racial) fetishization of women's bodies, a combination that speaks to ongoing discussions about certain norms and values in American society.

While Wendt, Albrecht, and Hampf investigate the interrelationship between Schwarzenegger's bodybuilding and discourses about gender and race, Jörg Scheller's "Performing the Subject—Subjecting the Performance: Arnold Schwarzenegger in the Context of Postmodern Aesthetics between Pop Art, Camp, and Performance/Body Art" opens up quite a different context to understand the figure and his sport: the simultaneously evolving artistic movements of body art and performance art. Scheller argues that bodybuilding and art are different sides of the same coin, constituting distinctively postmodernist attempts to merge art and life, subject and object, high and low culture. According to Scheller, Schwarzenegger's tremendous success as a bodybuilder can only be understood against this background. Coming to California in 1968, Schwarzenegger embraced a postmodern lifestyle—he decided to "mirror" his environment, as Scheller puts it—which he quickly came to embody. Accordingly, Scheller compares him to a figure that is arguably the epitome of postmodernism, Andy Warhol. Stressing the commonalities in their lifestyles and convictions, Scheller argues that both nevertheless have to be understood as examples of conservatism. In addition, in an international context, Arnold Schwarzenegger can be regarded as an instance of the "living artworks" that artists were creating around the globe in the 1960s and 1970s. Scheller concludes, however, that whereas these artists usually stressed openness, Schwarzenegger's "art" is, again, more conservative as it sought to accomplish an ideal.

Julian Hanich's essay, "Mr. Schnitzelicious, the Muscle Man: Somatic Empathy and Imaginary Self-Extension in Arnold Schwarzenegger's Hard-Body Movies," shifts the focus from bodybuilding to film but continues the previous essays' engagement with the body. Distinguishing himself from both the preceding and the following essays, Hanich argues against semiotic interpretations that ask what representations of Schwarzenegger's body mean and what discourses they are connected to. Instead, he opts for a phenomenological approach that tries to understand what viewers experience when they watch Schwarzenegger's body in motion. His point of departure is the

observation that the action sequences and the obsessive displays of Schwarzenegger's muscular body in his 1980s films typically serve no narrative function and must therefore be understood as spectacles that provide different kinds of pleasures. Much of the pleasure of watching these scenes in particular and an Arnold Schwarzenegger movie as a whole, he argues, results from the possibility of partaking in the actor's muscular strength through the reflexive and prereflective process of somatic empathy. Hanich identifies several strategies through which Schwarzenegger's "hard body" films seek to intensify the viewer's somatic empathy before situating this concept in relation to the more encompassing one of imaginary self-extension. Cautioning against mistaking self-extension for projection or identification, Hanich explains that audiences always remain aware of the fact that they are not Schwarzenegger or the characters he plays.

In "Incorporations: On the Mediality of Arnold Schwarzenegger's Cinematically Built Bodies," Lisa Gotto analyzes Schwarzenegger's films from the vantage point of media studies. Considering Schwarzenegger's body a medium, Gotto argues that his incorporations enable viewers to reflect on abstract concepts such as movement, gender, and technology. Focussing on the binaries of mobility and immobility, masculinity and femininity, and biology and technology, Gotto demonstrates that Schwarzenegger's filmic bodies constantly cross the boundaries between these seemingly strict binaries, thus enabling audiences to realize the arbitrariness of all attempts to distinguish clearly between them. She shows that films as diverse as *Conan the Barbarian* and *Last Action Hero* both put Schwarzenegger's body in motion and repeatedly halt the action to display the motionless body in a fashion reminiscent of the poses Schwarzenegger habitually assumed during his bodybuilding career. Moreover, from the late 1980s onwards, Schwarzenegger's parts increasingly oscillate between the poles of the tough guy and a different kind of masculinity that incorporates many characteristics traditionally regarded as feminine, a development that climaxes in *Junior*, where Schwarzenegger plays a pregnant man. Gotto finally shows that Schwarzenegger's most famous role, the Terminator, challenges the opposition between human and machine, since this cyborg is only the most obvious example of the merging of the two that all parts of the series stage in manifold ways.

As Gotto discusses in passing how Schwarzenegger's decision to

supplement his traditional action fare with roles in comedies affected his public perception, she touches upon the issue of Schwarzenegger's image and its development over time. Her contribution thus functions as a bridge between the preceding essays, all of which focus on Schwarzenegger's body, and the subsequent ones, which all concentrate on his image. Equally importantly, as she is interested in both body and image, she brings to the fore the intrinsic connections between these two concepts. This connection is also reflected in the theoretical discourse on image as an analytical tool, which treats the concept in much the same fashion as corporeality. Image, as most disciplines would agree, can be defined as a deliberately constructed interpretation of reality that reflects societal norms and values. As in the case of interpretations of the body, however, images can also question such values and thus reflect, accelerate, or impede social change. Image as a concept is particularly useful when these constructed interpretations of reality are part of intentional marketing strategies that can be observed in the business of film, music, and sport. In the realm of politics, image also tends to be crucial. Few politicians are able to win voters over if they fail to establish a coherent and popular image that conforms to the norms and values of their constituents. The politics of image can improve or completely destroy positive attitudes toward people or products within short periods of time.⁷

As with the construction of notions of "natural" and "unnatural" bodies, the mass media are central to the complex processes of communication that produce certain images. The image of film stars, for instance, is created not only through the medium film but also through the interplay of producers, journalists, audiences, and the film stars themselves.⁸ Probing these complexities with regard to Schwarzenegger's career as an actor, Michael Butter's and Rüdiger Heinze's essays investigate how Schwarzenegger's screen roles constructed a very specific image for him and how he actively tried to influence his public image by choosing certain roles and by encouraging or dismissing being identified with the parts he played in interviews and other statements. Both of these essays, then, are contributions to star studies, a relatively young branch of film studies that only gained momentum with the

⁷ Cf. Lowry; Münkler and Seegers; and Wendt.

⁸ Cf. Boorstin; Drucker and Cathcart; Herbst; Mason; and Wippersberg.

publication of Richard Dyer's *Stars* in 1979.⁹ Prior to that, film scholars had largely focused on issues of narrative, genre, and formal devices, and thus more or less ignored the fact that since its inception at the beginning of the last century Hollywood cinema has always been organized around stars.

The reasons for Hollywood's unwavering interest in stars are in a double sense economic. Audiences pay to see a certain star, which is why the name of the stars usually appears above the title on film posters and in letters nearly or just as big. In fact, one could define a film star as Ned Tanen does, as an actor who "will sell tickets to a movie that is not a very good movie."¹⁰ Equally importantly, however, stars are a big advantage for the narrative economy of a film. When a character is played by a star, the film does not need to spend much time to characterize that part. The audience will ascribe to the character what they associate with the star. The star persona thus significantly and effectively contributes to a film's meaning. *Taxi Driver*, for example, would be a completely different film if the lead role was played not by Robert De Niro, but by, say, somebody else closely connected with New York, Woody Allen. Both De Niro and Allen are movie stars with distinct and quite different images, which they bring to every part they play.

Throughout Hollywood history, though, films have repeatedly employed the fixed images of their stars to play with audience expectations by either "off-casting" their stars, that is, by having them play parts that represent the opposite of what they usually stand for, or by keeping it in the balance until the very end if the role the star plays will turn out to be his or her typical one after all.¹¹ Casting Bette Davis as a kind character in *The Great Lie* (1941) constituted a clear case of off-casting, because Davis had played only malicious and even violent women before. By contrast, the suspense of films such as *Presumed Innocent* (1990) or *Collateral* (2004) depends to a large degree on the fact that the audience continues to harbor doubts that Harrison Ford has

⁹ Other studies that examine the construction and functions of star personas are Basinger; Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies* (whose title hints at the close connection between "image" and "body"); Marshall; McDonald; and Stacey. The following paragraphs present a condensed version of the argument these studies make.

¹⁰ Qtd. in Maltby 384.

¹¹ On off-casting in Hollywood, see Maltby 387.

murdered his lover or that Tom Cruise is a ruthless killer, although the films suggest this from the outset. And whereas one instance of off-casting is not enough to seriously affect the image of a film star, their public personas do change if they continue to play roles that diverge from what audiences associate with them. Robert DeNiro's star persona, for instance, has softened considerably in recent years because he has begun to appear in family comedies such as *Meet the Parents* (2000), where he self-consciously mocks the tough guys he previously played exclusively. Something similar happened to Arnold Schwarzenegger's image at the end of the 1980s, and this is what the essays by Butter and Heinze focus on.¹²

In "From Rough Guy to Family Guy: The Transformation of Arnold Schwarzenegger's Star Persona in *Twins* and *Kindergarten Cop*," Michael Butter explores how the first two comedies in which Schwarzenegger starred—*Twins* (1988) and *Kindergarten Cop* (1990)—initiated and corroborated an image change that would ultimately make the formerly "rough guy" Schwarzenegger eligible for the office of Governor of California. Whereas *Twins* ironically engages and eventually abandons his 1980s image as a lonesome and not too intelligent fighter in favor of that of a husband and father, *Kindergarten Cop*, as Butter demonstrates, consolidates the star's new image by merging the positive facets of the old image, i.e., values such as strength and determination, with new elements, such as a firm belief in families both real and symbolic. As a result, from the early 1990s onwards, Schwarzenegger is a deadly fighter and a loving father, a hero and the guy next door, an outsider and someone firmly integrated in the community. Thus, Butter concludes, he represented exactly those values that the Californian electorate was looking for in 2003.

Tracing a development in Schwarzenegger's choice of heroes, Rüdiger Heinze's "Conformist Rebels and Popular Outsiders: Arnold Schwarzenegger's Movie Heroes" observes the modification in the actor's star persona that Butter identifies from a different angle. Heinze argues that Schwarzenegger's parts change from being *superhuman* to

¹² This volume, then, contains no essay that explores the construction of Schwarzenegger's image as a traditional action hero or that engages his *Terminator* films. This is a conscious omission, since these aspects have been addressed by previous studies. Cf., among others, Freedman; Larson; and Sears.

being super *human*, that, over time, they become more pensive, considerate, and social. More than Butter, though, he insists on the surprising continuity of Schwarzenegger's public image throughout his career as bodybuilder, movie star, and politician. This continuity—and Schwarzenegger's broad appeal—is due in large part to the rather ambiguous character of many of the heroes he has portrayed. In a curious dialectic, those heroes are most often representatives of the executive (police, military, intelligence) who set out to re-establish the political and societal order after some kind of rupture. At the same time, however, in doing so, they frequently resort to means outside that order (murder, vigilantism, torture). Thus, while they can never be completely a part of that order, neither are they vilified for standing outside of it—they remain conformist rebels as well as popular outsiders. It is, as Heinze demonstrates, exactly this combination of the "liminal hero" on the border between conventional societal order and the "*human superhuman*" that provides the basis for Schwarzenegger's political image and electoral appeal.

Many of this collection's essays, then, demonstrate not only how Schwarzenegger's ability to create and shape his image helped boost his career, but they also speak to the significant impact Schwarzenegger has had on American culture. Yet in the realm of politics even Schwarzenegger ultimately had to recognize that image alone is insufficient to produce political and social change, because systemic conditions and entrenched political interests can prove to be insurmountable. Exactly this interplay of Schwarzenegger's image, his political ideology, and the peculiar political system of the state of California is fully explored in Patrick Keller's "Images of California Conservatism: Arnold Schwarzenegger and Political Ideology." Keller explains how California's arguably broken system of direct democracy helped a candidate with Schwarzenegger's image and background to achieve gubernatorial power and how Schwarzenegger tried to modify and instrumentalize his politics as well as his image in order to succeed under these conditions. For the governor to live up to the expectations of his voters, and the demands of his image as strongman governor, however, he ultimately had to transcend and alter the systemic constraints of the Californian executive. In Schwarzenegger's failure to do so, the supreme influence of systemic factors over the individual politics of image and ideology becomes apparent. Thus, neither Schwar-

zenegger's electoral successes nor his version of moderate Republicanism seem to hold much of a model for other politicians to emulate.

There might, however, be one element of Schwarzenegger's political platform that in fact could be copied by moderate conservatives: his environmentalism. In "You Are Regulated! Governing the Green State," Frank Sauer employs vocabulary analysis to trace the "gradual greening" of Schwarzenegger's policy. Like Keller, Sauer focuses on the interplay between policy and image, describing how Schwarzenegger started out as a conventional pro-business Republican who, for political as well as economic and ideological reasons, slowly developed the idea of a "green economy," which then turned into the centerpiece of his second administration. This process was accompanied—and indeed fostered—by Schwarzenegger's adaption of his own image: The cigar-chomping, hummer-driving action star as an advocate for alternative fuel engines commands an appealing persuasiveness among broader parts of the population than most environmentalists. Illuminating the mechanisms of this turn-around, Sauer's essay is a case study in the successful re-branding of an image, used to great political effect.

While Sauer traces an image change, Günther Bischof and Philip Strobl's "California Dreaming: Arnold Schwarzenegger as the Quintessential American Immigrant?" focuses on the continuities that characterized one of the central images that Arnold Schwarzenegger utilized throughout his career: his own life story as an immigrant who ultimately succeeded in pursuing the American Dream. Their essay about Schwarzenegger's biography and the distorted autobiographical tale that he used to further his career as a politician seeks to disentangle myth from reality. Analyzing Schwarzenegger within the context of American immigration history, Bischof and Strobl explain how and why he left his native Austria to seek fame and riches in America, comparing his life trajectory with that of other immigrants who came to America in the twentieth century. They also detail how Schwarzenegger, both as a political candidate and as governor, twisted and shaped his life story to be able to portray himself as the epitome of the successful American Dream, thus bringing to the fore the ambiguities of his politics when being confronted with the realities of immigration in present-day California.

This concluding essay brings the volume full circle, since it explores

both Schwarzenegger's path toward becoming the world's most renowned bodybuilder and the ways in which he has actively shaped his public persona as a film star and politician. Body and image have been crucial to his phenomenal rise to stardom in America. At the same time, U.S. culture clearly bears the imprint of Schwarzenegger and his ideas about body and image. Taken together, the essays collected in this volume thus help us better understand Arnold Schwarzenegger the phenomenon as well as the culture of his adopted country. As Schwarzenegger's second term as Governor of California is drawing to a close, it is difficult to predict where he will be headed next. One thing, however, is certain: He'll be back.

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