

Physical Culturists' *technosomata*: Bodybuilder, Hercules, and the Terminator

This paper incorporates the notion of *technosoma*, the techno-body, in the analysis of modern physical culture movement and its engagement with Classical antiquity. Building upon Donna Haraway's cyborg theory (Haraway 1991), the expression *technosoma* challenges the traditional opposition between "natural" bodies and "artificial" technologies and instead conveys a conception of "the body in which natural and technical instances are inextricably interwoven" (Chesi 2023). This concept helps us understand the tension between naturality and artificiality in the world of physical culture, whose aesthetics were largely created by treating Greco-Roman artificial bodies as representations of real bodies in ancient times and as models which modern people must try to replicate.

The physical culture movement, which started in the 19th century and advocated for improvements on one's mind and body through physical training, appropriated artworks from the ancient world for their missions. Eugen Sandow, the most important figure in physical culture, claimed that his passion for physical training was ignited by ancient statues and posed as those statues in his performances. More recent examples include Joe Weider, trainer of the famous Arnold Schwarzenegger, who names the *Farnese Hercules* sculpture as the greatest inspiration for his bodybuilding career (Todd 2005). The treatment of sculptures as live models is not a modern invention, as Galen (King 2023) and Philostratus (König 2009) both present Polycleitus' *Kanon* as an ideal figure for athletes to emulate. Viewing athletic bodies as *technosomata* aids us in understanding these fascinating instances of boundary-crossing between nature and artifacts. Examination of techno-bodies in Greek myth reveal that humans "have always been technosomatic hybrids of natureculture" (Liveley 2023), which provides the ground for

comparison between human bodies and sculptured bodies as both existing on the spectrum of natureculture. Physical culture is a technological intervention which creates cyborgs in Haraway's sense, hybrid beings between flesh and statues, natural and artificial, real and ideal. Terms such as "bodybuilding" and "body sculpting" support this point by highlighting the artificiality of well-trained human bodies. It is perhaps not a coincidence that Arnold Schwarzenegger, the world's most famous bodybuilder, became the epitome of an artificial techno-human in our modern imagination in the *Terminator* film (1984).

This study contributes to our understanding of how ancient aesthetics influenced modern images of the perfect body and the beauty standards. Despite its undeniable significance, the exercise and fitness culture has been a blindspot until recently for many Classicists writing about the afterlife of Greco-Roman aesthetics. Simon Goldhill, for example, almost entirely skips over the subject of physical culture, except for a brief mention of Charles Atlas, when he was writing about how Greek bodies constitute our concept of an ideal body (Goldhill 2004). There are only several recent publications which specifically deal with Classical reception in physical culture (Stocking 2014, Miller 2018, Franks 2025), and this paper enriches their discussion of how the ancient world shaped our own definition of beauty and health in the modern Western world.

Works Cited

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