

*It's as satisfying to me as, uh, coming is, you know? As, ah, having sex with a woman and coming. And so can you believe how much I am in heaven? I am like, uh, getting the feeling of coming in a gym, I'm getting the feeling of coming at home, I'm getting the feeling of coming backstage when I pump up, when I pose in front of 5 000 people, I get the same feeling, so I am coming day and night. I mean, it's terrific. Right? So you know, I am in heaven.*

Arnold Schwarzenegger, PUMPING IRON (1977)

Paris December 1981,

A meeting of bodybuilders, those known as body builders in the Atlantic, was held in the French capital. This performative and artistic discipline consists of developing one's muscular mass with an aesthetic aim, then exhibiting it by executing a series of codified plastic poses.

If the question of the body and its correlation with the soul has its Western roots in Ancient Greece, the heroes of yesterday, sculpted for sport and for war, are no longer the norm. A break in the philosophical relationship to the question of aesthetics then occurred. If this notion had acquired with Kant and Hegel a definition intrinsically linked to art, the American cultural hegemony tends to impose a new one. The objectivism developed by Ayn Rand serves as a religion. In this framework, man is guided by the pursuit of his own individual happiness and embodies a heroic character under the aegis of reason, which she calls rational egoism.

Since the 1950s, magazines aimed at males, young or old, from pin-ups to comic books, have been full of advertisements boasting of a sculpted body with the aim of selling methods where there is no longer any question of an athletic body. Narcissism is used as a solution to complexes. Many bodybuilders enter through this gateway. The flagship competition, in which practitioners compete in front of a jury, has existed since 1965, and the winner is awarded the Mr. Olympia prize.

But at the beginning of the 80's, a turning point was reached in the practice, which has never stopped pushing its own limits since its beginnings, more than anyone else, one man embodies it: Arnold Schwarzenegger. Winner of seven awards, he defines

a canon for this generation and a symbol that has become worldwide, he is the aesthetic must. If this depends largely on the cultural context of each individual who, depending on the context, will designate the monstrous as beautiful or its opposite, Hollywood, by seizing his figure, imposes it worldwide. The machine body must reign, burying man in the process. Muscle building rather than education, displaying oneself rather than existing, excess for excess's sake, the machine rather than the human.

In a society based on image, the place of the body and its representation is becoming primordial, unsurpassable in the control of the masses over themselves. Billions of daily selfies, standardised beauty canons, industrialisation of desires, normalisation of bodies. If today bodybuilding is part of our customs, these super bodies are the perfect allegory of our post-industrial world. Machine bodies that wander around the cinema screens as mainstream heroes. Gladiators in search of a fight, their only opponent being their own reflection. Bodies are industrialised to the point of becoming the syntax of a world that would like to believe itself limitless. A capitalised body, dedicated to the flight ahead of its own image. A warrior without war, a worker without work, a sports show without confrontation. The statues remain, the myths die pitifully, because nothing is sacred anymore, and everything is Art.

These bodybuilders, self-taught sculptors, have replaced marble and earth with flesh and muscle, while waiting for electrical circuits. Sort of total and degenerate artists. Muscles are flexed, buttocks are contoured and faces are contorted, veins ready to implode. From now on suffering and pleasure seem to go hand in hand. In this glistening ooze, one is even surprised to see the carnation of yet another enchantment of a middle class that is too middle class to dream of a world enchanted only by advertising. In a world where Jansenism is the official doxa, which makes a cult out of superficial beauty, the builder shines. He shines, magnificent, sculpted, immobile, and for the space of a pose, we are caught up in seeing a fragile God under tension.

The ostentatious display of industrial fat acts as a revelator, revealing indeterminate erogenous zones. Hygienism, which is now the norm, sees a population of urban depressives sweating in fitness rooms where deodorant vapours and perspiration mingle, while weight machines in turn sculpt an army of testosterone-fuelled terminators.

*No pain, no gain, hasta la vista baby !*

## Culturisme

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