Politically, Nordic Nazism and Fascism never amounted to much. The Nazi parties in Scandinavia never played any important role in political life. Only elements without significant influence wanted parliamentary democracy to be replaced by totalitarianism. In Sweden there was many small Nazi-parties, but even the biggest one, Nationalsocialistiska arbetarpartiet (NSAP/SSS), led by Sven Olof Lindholm, never gained any political influence. Jointly it had under 1% of the vote and was never represented in parliament. At the last general election before the war (1939) the Nazis in Denmark gained only 1.8% of the vote. The percentage in Norway was the same (1936), while in Finland the fascist IKL party had about 4% of the votes in 1939. In Iceland the Nazis never climbed above the level of 0.2% of the vote.¹

But, these low numbers cannot blur the fact that the indirect influence of Fascism and Nazism was of some importance in all Nordic countries in the 1930s, and that German-Italian political culture made a strong impact on many, some quite influential, people. So, this article is about both parts: the full-blooded Nazis and the lukewarm people fascinated by Fascism in the 1930s.

Drawing parallels between them, but also pointing to the factors that prevented people flirting with Fascism from being committed Nazis, this article is not least interested in the political and cultural climate in the between-war period with its interest in the body as both a substantial and symbolic factor in the political mobilisation in the between-war period.
The main purpose of the article is to elucidate relations between sports, bodyculture and politics in Scandinavia in the 1920s and 1930s, pointing at the role of sports as a crucial political factor.

The field of analysis is the whole of Fenno-Scandinavia, but the greatest emphasis is laid on the complicated situation in Denmark where the German influence, much to the regret of the Danes, nevertheless, had been strong for centuries. This influence was no less in the 1930s.

However, the question first arises as to why people in Scandinavia were fascinated with Fascism and Nazism. Several Scandinavian analysts have invoked the theory of “co-runners”: German Nazism was so successful that it inspired some people in Scandinavia to run with the winners. Another explanation is that of the “Führer” model: Hitler made such a strong charismatic impact on the public that people were inspired to follow a leader: the Danish DNSAP leader Frits Clausen certainly behaved like a Hitler clone! A third possible explanation was that the lower middle class was so demoralised by its low living standards that it readily joined a party promising a solution to its poor conditions. A fourth explanation is that of imitation: some people were so taken with the technical and social progress in Germany and hoped by emulation to equal it.

None of these explanations, however, pays sufficient attention to the argument of Henning Poulsen that Scandinavian Nazism did not come out of the blue. The apparent lack of political influence of the Scandinavian Nazi parties cannot be taken as an indication of the rejection of fascistoid ideas in Scandinavia in the 1930s. There were more Danish volunteers in the German army during Second World War than Danish seamen sailing in the allied navies, and the number of Danish resistance fighters was also smaller.

The fascistoid danger

The low number of votes for the Nazis in the parliamentary elections should not be allowed to obscure the fact that there was a heavy fascist and fascistoid impact on political culture and especially on body culture in Scandinavia in the inter-war period. In all Scandinavian countries there was an obvious fascistoid influence on the collective mentality, particularly in the 1930s, which marked the social climate to a much greater extent.
than the percentage of fascist votes might suggest. This holds true for Denmark, Finland and Norway and to a lesser extent for Sweden.

The Nazi party in Norway, *Nasjonal Samling*, was led by Vidkun Quisling. He was born in 1887 into a family of Danish immigrants. His father was a village pastor and rural dean. In 1905, the year Norway gained independence from Sweden, Quisling entered the Norwegian military academy, where he graduated in 1908. During the 1910s and 1920s he acquired considerable diplomatic experience, not least from working in the Soviet Union. In these years he showed a great interest in the Norwegian Labour Movement. At the beginning of the 1930s, however, Quisling became a thoroughbred nationalist, and in 1933 he founded the Norwegian Nazi party. He was more and more influenced by the German Nazis, so that it was natural for him in the 1940s to become the hated leader of the puppet government of Norway. His statements about childhood and youth on the eve of his death, just before his prosecution in 1947, are significant. He declared that he had been brought up among Viking graves, amid scriptural history and ancient sagas. He claimed to belong to an ancient house and to have been inculcated with the pride of family and history.  

This kind of history-tracing was not unfamiliar even in non-fascist circles in Scandinavia, pointing to yet another explanation apart from those presented above: that the fascistoid movement was a part of the whole cultural spirit in the inter-war period. Unless this circumstance is considered, one might well be tempted to neglect the fact that even the seemingly democratic Nordic countries were in danger of finding themselves in the realm of fascist influence. As we shall see below, this threat was prevalent not least in Denmark.

It cannot be ignored that all the Nordic countries saw the emergence of a strong anti-democratic right-wing movement during the 1930s, prevailing among young people in particular, with a rhetoric similar to that of Vidkun Quisling. Ever since Hitler’s take-over in 1933 there was a distinct influence from national socialist ideas on the young right in all the Nordic countries. In Denmark, many young Conservatives in the 1930s moved from the Conservative Party to DNSAP, the biggest Danish Nazi party.

In Finland the Lappo Movement, a strong nationalistic and anti-communist farmers’ organisation founded in the town of Lappo in Österbotten,
the heartland of Mannerheim’s resistance to the Red Guard during the civil war,\(^7\) gained ground after 1929 under the leadership of Vihtori Kosola (1884–1936). In 1930 it organised a “farmers’ procession” to Helsinki, which led to the dissolution of the parliament and emergency measures against the communists. The Lappo Movement then escalated its anti-democratic violent measures, which included kidnapping people and driving them to the Russian border, but in 1932 the movement was stopped by the conservative government by force of arms. Several of its leaders were sent to jail, and the movement was banned. It was, however, followed by the quasi-fascistoid IKL, the Patriotic People’s Movement, which held fourteen seats in the 1933 parliament, and during the whole period between the wars by the right-wing Civil Guard of Finland, which with its patriotic enthusiasm considered itself the true incarnation of the Finnish people and the legal protector of the civil society.

This protection included physical exercise and military training, as described with bitter irony in the novels of Väinö Linna,\(^8\) but also a fierce xenophobic and chauvinist ideology, marked by both anti-communism and “Blut und Boden” philosophy,\(^9\) which differed strongly from the new modernist circles, which grew stronger in Finland too in that country’s vehemently antagonistic political and cultural climate in the 1930s.\(^10\)

In Sweden the youth organisation of the Conservative Party acted as an independent body after 1934, and because of its Nazification during the latter half of the 1930s a divorce from the mother party was inevitable, which facilitated a still more evident fascistoid tone in this youth movement, invoking self-sacrifice and unselfishness and a “front against class struggle in all its utterances”, as they declared in Nationell tidning (“National Journal”) in the summer of 1933.\(^11\) And even if the Nazi ideology never really gained ground in Sweden, it is astonishing to realise that the question of entartete Kunst played a role in Sweden as early as April 1935, when the Nazi and merchant Erhard Carlsson attacked the painter and sculptor Bror Hjorth because of his supposed sexual obsessions and “impure” works, and that the Nazi journal Sverige Fritt (“Free Sweden”) even as early as 1935 mentioned that the “Bror Hjorth problem”, if it had arisen in Germany, would have been solved by means of a trip to concentration camp.\(^12\)
Otherwise Swedish Nazism differentiated from the other Nordic types of Nazism in a more explicit race-biology and in being more affected by socialism and interested in working class problems, whereas the extreme right wing farmers in Sweden were organised in *Bondeförbundet* (The Farmers’ Association) that took care of the idealization of the peasant culture but with whom the Nazis shared a very distinct racism.

In Denmark the movement *Jord Arbejde Kapital* (JAK), (“Earth Work Capital”) collaborated with the Nazi party during the years 1932–36. The same applies to the important organisation of Danish farmers, *Landbrugets Sammenslutning* (LS), (“The Farmers’ League”), which at its peak comprised 100,000 members, while JAK had 35,000 members, whereas the biggest Danish Nazi party, DNSAP, only had 5,000 members in 1939. In the Danish public the youth movement of the Conservative Party (KU), however, played a more visible role, not least due to its dramatic rhetoric and its remarkable performances, wearing uniforms and marching in the streets with “Führer” salutes.

But most influential in the sphere of body culture was, no doubt, the gymnastics programme of the charismatic and fascistoid Niels Bukh (1880–1950). His combination of ultra-right-wing statements and physical exercises at his “Gymnastic Academy” on the island of Funen affected thousands of young people from the countryside in the 1920s and 1930s, when they visited his school and received training as leaders and instructors in gymnastics. Although it would be too daring to claim that they returned to their villages as potential fascists, there is, on the other hand, no reason to underestimate the impact of Niels Bukh’s admiration of Hitler and Nazi Germany.

But it is also obvious that this seemingly new fascistoid movement did not arise out of nowhere.

**The Grundtvigian risk zone in Denmark**

During the 1880s the Danish Rifle and Gymnastics Movement saw the emergence of a new “alternative” bodily movement. This new order sought to show the civilisation potential of the yeomen in the countryside. The intention was to demonstrate that they were able to create “law and order”, in spite of the fact that they were uncivilised farmers. One way of
doing this was the performance of military-like mass performances of bodies moving in the same disciplined way, structured by a leader, with symmetry of movement and geometrical positions.

This bodily drill with its constrained movements of a Foucaultian kind was also seen as a way of showing that whenever you performed with self-discipline you also proved that you were not disciplined by anyone else. The self-restraint with its straight lines of taut, erect bodies was interpreted as a demonstration of the forthcoming freedom of the affluent parts of the countryside. They saw themselves as part of the Grundtvigian “cultural revolution” with the folk academies, the assembly halls and the co-operative societies of production as institutional pillars. The body, however, also played an important role as a symbolic pillar: by demonstrating a common rhythm, precise straight lines and synthetic discipline, the young yeomanry displayed their health and collective fitness. By this demonstration of social integration and national hygiene they showed that they were ready to take over.

On the ideological level, these Grundtvigian farmers emphasised consensus and organic growth. Culture was seen as nature, often symbolised by trees and plants, and the idea of organism was generally regarded as the most central feature of human life. At the same time rootedness and “Nordic” traditional values such as devotion and self-sacrifice were stressed, partly as a contrast to the dangerous German culture, as Germany, in the opinion of the movement’s founder, N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872), was a threat to Nordic culture, and partly as a contrast to the reckless individualism which according to Grundtvig haunted Danish society. As a counter to this egocentricity, Grundtvig favoured the collective myths (especially Nordic mythology) with their visions of dim connections and coherences between people and history, produced not by reason and science, but by a combination of reason, emotion and fantasy. As one of the leading Grundtvigians, Jørgen Bukdahl, put it in an article, entitled “The Men of Dawn”: “Poetry and spirit as the spring of exploits. Now here we see the historical basis for free Danish youth.” This high-flown tone was typical of the Grundtvigian style of rhetoric.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the traditional Grundtvigian physical self-constraint with the bodies standing in rows was, however, seen as an insufficient expression of the power of the farmers: they could
not accept the view of themselves as stiff and solid bodies, now when they were moving into the circles of power. The moving countryside had to be re-interpreted as a moving – and vital – body.

The solution to this demand was the so-called “primitive gymnastics”, invented by Niels Bukh at Ollerup Gymnastic Academy, founded in 1920 as the first Danish folk academy, specialising in body culture, with his underlining of youth, strength and dynamic vitality. This “primitive gymnastics” differed from the old gymnastics in that the old stationary forms of movement were replaced by vigorous jumps, leaps and vaults. But the drill and submission under the leader’s command as well as the extreme discipline and self-discipline were still in focus, heightened by the grandiose transformation of gymnastics into mass displays, as seen at the great rallies at Ollerup and Snoghøj Folk Academies – the last one inspired by the Finnish gymnastics theorist Elli Björkstén, who dissociated herself from Niels Bukh’s ideas after 1937.20

On the ideological level the emphasis on loyalty, consensus, Nordic rootedness, self-sacrifice and devotion also continued together with the stress on folkelig (i.e. cooperative and nationalistic fellowship and community.

In contrast to Grundtvig’s anti-Germanism, Niels Bukh favoured German and Italian fascism. This, together with his adoration of the strong leader, which was not prominent in Grundtvig’s ideological universe, resulted in a still more obvious isolation from the Grundtvigian movement, which, in spite of being in the fascist risk zone, with few exceptions took severe exception to the fascist anti-democratic politics. The Grundtvigian scepticism about Niels Bukh was exacerbated by his corporealisation of gymnastics, with the emphasis on achievement and “body-production”.

Niels Bukh was a devoted admirer of both Hitler and Mussolini and travelled with his gymnastic teams in Japan, Italy and Germany (referring to them as his “Viking expeditions”). He was invited to the Nazi Parteitag in Nuremberg as an acknowledgement of his work with Danish youth, which in Germany was considered a new modern ideal, fully in line with the aspirations of the German body culture after 1933. Nazi Germany had an intuitive understanding of the strange combination of pre-modern ideology and modern fitness-orientated body culture which was so typical
of Niels Bukh’s gymnastics. He combined a pre-modern ideology with a body culture of modernity.

Consequently, it is not surprising that it was a former teacher at Ollerup, Viggo Munck, who was intended to be one of the six-headed leadership of Danish sport after a DNSAP take-over. In 1934 he had written a pamphlet on National Socialism and its education principles, and he had had travelled in Germany in the 1930s as well as in 1940 and 1942. In 1945 he wrote the book *Arv, Race og Kaar* (“Heritage, Race and Conditions”).

**Form, feature and fascination in Scandinavian fascism**

When one looks more closely at the content of Scandinavian fascism, it is obvious that there are several traits that return again and again: racism, anti-communism, anti-Semitism, a distinct aversion to modernity in the sense of everything new in the cultural area – and a certain inclination towards bodily activism.

The first of these features were generally held in common with fascism all over Europe. Racism, anti-communism and nationalism were common stuff, together with a distinct tendency to worship *irratio* and cultivate the body. These last two components were combined in the common denominator of agency and bodily vivacity: the body and the capacity for strong, energetic, muscular activities. These ideas were often epitomised in the notion of purification: pure race, pure culture, pure movement and pure ideas. The whole complex of this was a fierce attack on every kind of effeminacy and softness.

As regards the performative traits of Scandinavian fascism, the tendency towards impressing the public by means of presentative rather than representative symbols was just as obvious as in other parts of Europe. The worshipping of flags and banners, anthems and uniforms – with its contingent idealisation of dim and uncertain meanings – was just as common as the belief that the very demonstration of bodily force in the streets was more important than argumentative strength.

It is important, however, also to remember that German Nazism never took much interest in foreign Nazi parties. The crucial task was to export German Nazism, not to inspire other countries’ Nazi parties. The result of
this was that Scandinavian fascism was left on its own. They therefore had to invent their own vocabulary and their own symbolism.

In Scandinavia this meant that Swedish Nazism often turned to the “great” history of the 15th and 16th century peasant leaders Engelbrekt and Gustav Eriksson Vasa22, whereas their Danish and Norwegian brothers turned to the Vikings and the Middle Ages.23 The brave warriors of the Viking Age with their fierce attack on soft and effeminate enemies, especially in Great Britain, were seen as ideals. The same “civilising” tendency held true for the picture of the crusaders of the Middle Ages, and the Danes could use the circumstance that one of the crusades was directed eastwards, to Estonia, where, furthermore, the Danish flag was said to have fallen down from the sky in 1219.24 Here, the Danish and Swedish fascist rhetoric in particular could invoke history both as antagonism against “eastern” communism and against people on a supposedly lower level of civilisation; whereas the Norwegian fascists, as seen above in the life-history of Vidkun Quisling, used the heroic Viking Age thirst for freedom, the cult of the old freeborn Norwegians (not least incarnated in the old Norse kings’ “housecarls”) as symbols. Only through the national socialist Nordic ideals of freedom, with roots going back to the Viking Age, the Nordic fascists thought, was it possible to reshape the inner strength and the inner community which was a precondition for a new society where only might made right. Ove Larsen, a young SS volunteer, expressed this characteristically in 1942:

The Nordic man – what a proud past, but above all, what a magnificent future is at his feet! By means of our blood, land created for us by Nature has today been captured. History once again offers it to us. But this time Victory will be ours once and for all. Our blood will not be shed in vain. Widespread parts of the Baltic area’s metre-thick soil under working Nordic hands! Boundless visions.25

In Scandinavia the cult of the Aryan race never really gained a foothold. It was probably seen as too exotic and had never played a role in the social climate and the cultural reservoir of Scandinavia. It was therefore much more tempting to use the Nordic symbols of the Vikings, which were also favoured by the Grundtvigians as symbols of energy, truth and bold honour.
Both the Grundtvigians and the fascists in the inter war-period shared an interest in the runic script, and countless books, pamphlets, bills and posters were printed with imitation carved runes, characterised by their stiff, raw and primitive angles; but whereas the Grundtvigians by this wanted to stress honesty, truth and honour, the fascists intended to underline the violence and the hard work of this way of writing. The common denominator, however, was the wish for authenticity.

In order to emphasise a distinctive Nordic identity, however, it was also important for the fascists to use at least some symbols which differed from all of the rest of the right-wing symbolism: this symbol was the lure, the curved Bronze Age trumpet. The lures, as shown by the Danish historian John T. Lauridsen, became the symbol \textit{par excellence} of the Danish fascist movement.\textsuperscript{26} The symbolism of this could hardly be more pre-modern. The bronze lures were often flanked by candelabras and standards, meant as a further sign of antiquity, struggle and exuberant devotion.

\textbf{Resemblances and differences in the Nordic cult of the Nordic}

To sum up, it can be maintained that the non-fascist Grundtvigian movement, the fascistoid Niels Bukh and the Danish thoroughbred fascists all shared the fascination of high-flown rhetoric, in which much of the same vocabulary and symbols was used in all three movements. Nordic history (not least the Viking Age and the Middle Ages) was also common property. All three movements exploited and emphasised Nordic mythology and the cult of a heroic past. The same applies to an idealistic conception of the world with an outspoken critique of materialism and a materialistic philosophy of life. Another common factor was a distinct nationalism: whereas the fascists emphasised blood lineage, the Grundtvigians underlined the national language as a criterion. A certain fascination with irrationality, based on rituals and myths as opposed to rationalism and science, was also favoured, together with a view of society as an organism and the notion that the individual had to submit to the unified whole of community and society. This was evident in the fondness for mass performances and rallies with the frequent use of singing, banners and mythological signs and symbols.

But there were also crucial differences. The Grundtvigians and the Nordic fascists also gathered around the common thought of a third power
between state and market and the dream of a weak state. Here the Grundtvigians saw the possibility of a new civil society based on dialogue and associative sociability, while the fascists saw a possibility for a new scope of action based solely on bodily power, where individuals and groups, as in the pre-Christian Nordic local community, legitimately used power to defend and promote their interests. The ideal was the Viking and early medieval society of chieftains and housecarls, where the position of the individual was based on the use of legitimate violence and power at the expense of other people. 27

The Grundtvigians, in addition, never surrendered to non-democratic politics, although this fascinated Niels Bukh and was an essential part of Danish fascist politics. Nor did the Grundtvigians, despite their approval of charismatic leaders and folk academy principles, accept the idea of “the strong man” as a political solution.

But the most important difference was perhaps the attitude to war, fighting and violence. Here the Grundtvigians never budged an inch, in that many Grundtvigians, both by tradition and through the influence of the folkelig sociability, were outspoken in their detestation of violence. The non-militaristic and in some circles even pacifist attitude was incompatible with any notion of bodily fighting (not even verbal fighting). 28 In their opinion dialogue was the primary way of resolving conflicts. Nor can one accuse Niels Bukh of being a war agitator, whereas the Danish fascists openly and palpably advocated manly deeds such as fighting and the resolute use of the body in violence.

The many common cultural resemblances thus stand in sharp contradiction to other decisive differences. But a certain anti-modernism was prevalent in both the cultural and the political programmes in all three spheres.

These pre-modern ideals, however, differed most from another part of the quasi-fascist culture in the 1930s, namely, Niels Bukh’s body culture with its modern principles of movement, activism and dynamics. So on the one hand we have the myths and symbols of the bluff and solid Nordic yeoman families (the incarnation of rural “Gemeinschaft”) with their feet on the ground in non-movable and non-moving positions: “stasis” as stance. On the other hand we have the vitality and demonstration of palpable bodily actionism, as seen in the dynamic mass-performances of powerfully
moving bodies who transcend their rural groundedness in an urban-like mass demonstration of the modern “ec-stasis” of “Gesellschaft”. Bukh's aim was to create a new bodily consciousness which was intended to release men from tradition and fixed contexts. This new consciousness, in the words of the Swedish ethnologist Jonas Frykman, made them “at once agents and victims of modernity”: it put them in a state of permanent readiness. But it also put them in a state of contradiction and ambiguity. Let us have a closer look at this.

**Fascist body culture as a modern body culture**

The body situation of the fascist inter-war people was anything but unambiguous. Rather, it seemed marked by a number of contradictory tendencies and paradoxes. Specifically one may point to clashes between three fundamental characteristics of body culture which could be observed in the 1930s: (a) longing for authenticity, (b) subjectification, and (c) a stylised institutionalisation of corporeality.

The prerequisite for this is the cultural parcelling out of the body as an independent area which commenced with the breakthrough of modernity around 1750, and which has further accelerated throughout this century in the form of a particular body cultural differentiation where the body is cultivated *an sich*. One consequence of this was that the body appeared as an entity both self-referential and without references. This isolation of the body “an sich” and as a concept is a historical result, and on the other hand, the self-referentiality of the body was not without meaning in relation to the outside world. Beside its substantial function, the body of the inter-war period also functioned as a means of expression and interpretation.

The prevailing lack of confidence in rationality, in both technical-instrumental and philosophical respects, which emerged, in particular since the First World War, was probably one of the reasons for the increasing interest in the body as such, as a particular differentiated area. After the downfall of metaphysics, the implosion of transcendence and the lack of confidence in civilisation, the body in the 1920s became a foundation for optimism and life orientation. As a field of projection of wishes for permanence and fixed points, the body faced new demands for meaning. It seemed to secure a person in eternal youth in a world which was
otherwise drawing to a close. It is remarkable, though, that the means for attaining this permanent condition was movement, dynamics and speed.

This is the reason why the interest in the body institutionalised in the 1920s and 1930s implied dimensions of both criticism and affirmation of modernity, as can be seen in the features of authenticity, subjectivity and stylisation, which were prevalent already at that time and have which have been enhanced since then.

**Longing for authenticity**

This longing is connected with the idea that if one was to peel off culture’s layer of varnish one would reach pure, genuine nature. We are familiar with it from the naïve notion that somewhere there still is real and authentic nature, and if one breaks open this armour authenticity will break through as pure naturalness.

This way of thinking in the inter-war period was tied to a firm counter-positioning of nature and culture, where nature was often understood *ex negativo*, as all that was good, which culture was not. Without having actually defined what nature really is, how authentic it is, and why authenticity is more desirable than (evil) culture, the dream of true and genuine naturalness in relation to corporeality became one of the predominant norms of body culture during the fighting 1910s and the roaring 1920s with its worship of vitality.

Niels Bukh at the Ollerup Gymnastic Academy was perhaps Scandinavia’s most illustrative example of this combination of essentialism, body fixation and longing for authenticity in the 1930s. He and his pupils celebrated the pleasure of hard-working gymnastics exercised in order to get back to nature. This was, however, going to happen some time in the future: the ideal state was utopian. The girls attending Niels Bukh’s school were chosen not only for their sportive qualities, but also for their biological and bodily characters: blondes with blue eyes were preferred. Each individual girl was to incarnate the general and abstract Nordic ideal body in the hard toil for bodily perfection, which was interpreted as being close to the natural body. Niels Bukh called his gymnastic exercises “primitive”, inscribing them as a part of the typical Danish yeoman tradition in sports and gymnastics.30
But we should not be misled by all this yearning for authenticity. It was not a question of going back to some glorious traditions or some pre-modern values. It was a highly modern phenomenon: the other side of the coin called progress. It is no coincidence that although Niels Bukh called his gymnastics “primitive”, he also relentlessly declared that the remedies used at Ollerup were absolutely scientific. The ambivalence is outspoken. In an article in the composite work entitled *Sport – The Greatest Education of Our Time* (1943) he writes about these constructed exercises, that they can “release his pupils from their improper stances” and that they demand thorough anatomic knowledge, but only if “the claims to development are higher now than previously”. The scientific tone is unmistakably modern and far away from his pre-modern ideological myths.

**Subjectification and a painful self**

However, the Niels Bukh example also touches on the second of the central characteristics of body culture in these years: subjectification. In this area, however, it was not so much about normative standards. It was not, as is often thought, a question of a defensive armouring of a manhood already given, as something; that is, statements about men’s manhood as a stable entity which needed to be protected. Rather it was the opposite: a bold exploration of what man could become, in the light of practice. The subjectified and intensified manhood was something that had not yet taken place, it was something to happen, to come into being. It was about a curious but also the heroic promise of a not yet existing self and subject. And here again the body could lend a helping hand. The body became the domicile for the forward-looking, utopian strategies of the self.

The subjectification of body culture was mostly about being conscious of the body. It was not enough to associate with one’s body, to exist with it in peace and quiet. The pupils at Niels Bukh’s school were also supposed to find it necessary to be attentive to their bodies and to be conscious of having a body. On the other hand, they should also give priority to such “spiritual” subjects as nationalism and the family; issues in which the body is not the direct focal point of knowledge but only silently present. On the other hand, the body had to be continuously checked and informed. The body as such was institutionalised to an extreme extent and reduced to an
object in a means/end way of thinking. Overtly modern and rationalistic, consciousness of the body became just as important as bodily existence.

But, paradoxically, again and again, the self was the focal point – and consequently also modernity’s disease of reflection and craving for evaluation in relation to bodily existence and the way of having one’s body: Am I bodily enough? Am I controlled enough? Am I conscious enough of having and being a body? Am I fulfilling the norms for bodily behaviour? These were questions the pupils at Bukh’s academy perpetually had to ask themselves.

**Style and institutionalisation**

It was a central feature of the modern society of the 1920s and 1930s that the individual human being, and the young individual in particular, found it socially difficult to hold on to a sense of unity in life, just as it was difficult in the constant bombardment of the senses to hold on to an idea of subjectivity. Style, according to Georg Simmel, is the solution to this dilemma between social disorder and cultural order in the form of the oases made available as cultural offers of meaning.35

This offer of meaning at the cultural level was, however, not less real than the social aspects of existence, but it did not carry the mark of social disorder. It rather provided a way out created by will. It, too, marked the defensive but imaginative attempt of the individual’s arranging of matters in the midst of the superiority of hegemony. In other words, style was the rescue in the midst of the social throng which threatened to eliminate subjectivity.

The prerequisite for this is the fact that style marked the general and common. Style constituted a principle and an institution beyond the unique and the individual. Style marked a concordance which superseded the particularised aspects of the social part of the life of modern man. Style was an institution which related to the hardships of the pertinent individual resulting from modernity’s pushing the individual to an extreme point which threatened the annihilation of both parties. In this case style entered the scene as a supra-individual form and principle placed between the subjective personality and its objective surroundings.
However, style also carried with it the “misfortune” of eliminating the “natural” and the “inner”. Style’s stressing of surface, signs and signals set intimacy aside. If one wants one thing one cannot have the other. If Niels Bukh’s pupils wanted to be truly authentic and natural, for example, they would risk colliding with both the authoritative and code-related interpretation of the body which was contained in the institutionalised bodily education at his academy, and with the cool self-enactment related to the codes for public demonstration of the body, needed at the great gymnastics rallies.

Here the gymnasts displayed the dynamic “ec-static” body, moving out of itself, but also the “pure” and abstract body in its institutionalisation as body and nothing other than body. Its normative activism and vitalism was palpably demonstrated in the disguise of anonymous non-persons. The empirical individuals who lent bodies to this body display disappeared in favour of body as institution or principle. Any reference to a lived world was extinguished in favour of a scenery deprived of its mundane dimensions. It was the body meant in the third person, placed in a empty space without references.

**Four conclusions**

The risk of a strong fascistoid influence in Scandinavia in the 1930s was from a cultural point of view not as far away as is sometimes presumed. There was in all the Nordic countries a solid tradition of a distinct national-romantic ideology, which facilitated the possibility of the diffusion of fascist ideas. As we have seen, concentrating mostly on Denmark, the influential Grundtvigian movement shared many symbols and ideas with both the fascistoid Niels Bukh movement and the regular fascists in Denmark. But this correlation of the cultural level cannot be juxtaposed with corresponding similarities on the political level. Here the non-militaristic and pro-democratic Grundtvigian tradition prohibited any fascination with the idea of “the strong man” and the cult of “the hardened body” in fascism.

Here we probably have the first important reason why fascism – with the partial exception of the IKL movement in Finland – never came to play an important role in political life in Scandinavia. Much of the cultural and symbolic material which fascinated so many people in the inter-war period
all over Europe and the rest of the world, causing a distinct turn to fascism, was in Scandinavia used by more or less right-wing, but definitely pro-democratic and non-fascist political groups, who in this way subsumed, neutralised and disarmed the otherwise dangerous cultural elements. They were given legitimacy and acceptance in the drawing-room. As a seeming paradox it was the rather intimate cultural connection between the Grundtvigians in Denmark and the fascists that prevented fascism from gaining political influence. The space was already occupied, but with a totally different political purpose.

Much of this holds true for the admittedly more fascistoid political climate of Finland in the 1920s and 1930s. It was probably of tremendous importance that it was the conservative president Svinhufvud who stopped and dissolved the ultra-right-wing Lappo Movement in 1932. His resolute defence of Finnish democracy impressed those political circles that might otherwise have been tempted to follow the violent Lappo-yeomen’s bleak enterprise.

Secondly, it cannot be ignored that the Scandinavian countries on the whole were stable and solid societies. This was due first and foremost to the fact that all the Nordic countries were marked by the strong democratic tradition provided by the “reign of popular associations” which was inaugurated in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Here people were presented from their childhood with a democratic structure of management that was able to absorb much latent dissatisfaction through the elastic membrane of dialogue and negotiation. The strong fascist weapon of atomising society, that is, the isolation of the individual, was useless in societies that consisted of thousands of local associations and unions.

Thirdly, it is necessary to pay some attention to the fact that there was in all the Scandinavian societies a certain degree of political co-operation between the farmers and the workers: in Denmark since 1929 there had been a coalition government between the Social Democratic Party and the Radical Left, actually a middle-course party representing the small farmers. In Sweden the Social Democrats had governed since 1932 together with the Farmers’ Party. In Norway the same thing happened in 1935, when the Norwegian Labour Party more or less sacrificed its traditional idiosyncratic left-wing politics. In Finland the Social Democrats gained
places in the government in 1937, which was otherwise dominated by the farmers. This consensus politics, epitomised in the Swedish concept of Folkhemmet ("The People’s Home"), did not leave much space left for radical solutions from either left or right and provided on the whole the fundament for a nationalism which, as “welfare” nationalism, contrasted starkly with the “warfare” nationalism of fascists and Nazis.

Finally, it must be maintained that the Nordic cult of the Nordic hero in the inter-war period had one great problem: the difficult combination of two different poles. On the one hand a pre-modern culture with an obvious celebration of old Norse values such as honour, energy, push and drive as seen in Norse mythology and the Viking universe. This cultural dimension was marked by intense references to history. On the other hand there was a totally modern body culture with an obvious neglect of history, as the body was here objectified and abstract in its institutionalisation as merely body, without references to either experience, life history or history. This clash was never really solved and was perhaps one of the reasons why Scandinavian fascism ultimately was a failure: it had given itself a problem that was too difficult to solve.

References


Saarikangas, Kirs, Model Houses for Model Families. Gender, Ideology and the Modern Dwelling. The Type-Planned Houses of the 1940s in Finland (Helsinki: Söderström, 1993).


The Sports Historian No. 19 (1)


Weibull, Jörgen, Inledning, in: Molin, Karl *et al*: *Norden under 2. verdenskrig.* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1979)


Notes

1. Weibull, 1979, p. 15
15. Djursaa, 1981 p. 48
22. Lööw, 1990, p. 239.
23. Lauridsen, 1993b pp. 15-20
32. Bukh, 1944, p. 11.