

Strength and Stealth: Watching (and Wanting) Turn of the Century Strongmen

Thomas Waugh

Introduction

A triptych of erotic icons stares out from the Kinetoscopes made by Edison and Dickson in the mid-1890s, in fact the founding prototypes of the representation of sex and gender in the image technologies of the dawning century. If *The Kiss* (1896) is popularly mythologized as the Ur-text of the cinematic tradition of narrative eros and conjugal closure, the vignette of Carmencita (1894), the Spanish show business sensation that Edison lured into his Black Maria studio to perform her famous butterfly dance, inaugurates the tradition of woman as cinematic spectacle (not to mention the history of cinematic censorship, her "upturned ankles" and hint of lace having raised the ire of at least one would-be censor).¹ But, as a historian of the gay imaginary, and more specifically as sometime private investigator of the cultural regime in which the image of the male athlete has lured and accommodated the homoerotic gaze,² I rest my eye on a third Kinetoscope, the 1894 record of the famous strongman Eugen Sandow flexing his muscles for peepshow thrillseekers. My homoerotic gaze lingers, then fixates, then starts its own libidinous and intellectual flexing.

My pirate video copy of this Kinetoscope is only ten seconds long and its burnt-out scanlines scarcely outline the golden-haired hero as he faces the camera in a three-quarters shot. Mindful of the strict time limit of Edison's prototype machine, Sandow foregoes his legendary grace and zips at lightning speed through a repertory of ten poses, front and back, lifting his arms up and down, tensing his magnificent biceps and rippling his stupendous back. This text is normally subsumed uncritically, I suppose, then as now, under the minor history of sports performances or show-business documents in the cinema (all the more so since Sandow's tiny tight white trunks and otherwise uncovered body seem to have evoked no consternation whatsoever from the Comstocks of the day). Though the charisma of the star is evident in the fragment, few have noticed the key progenitor of

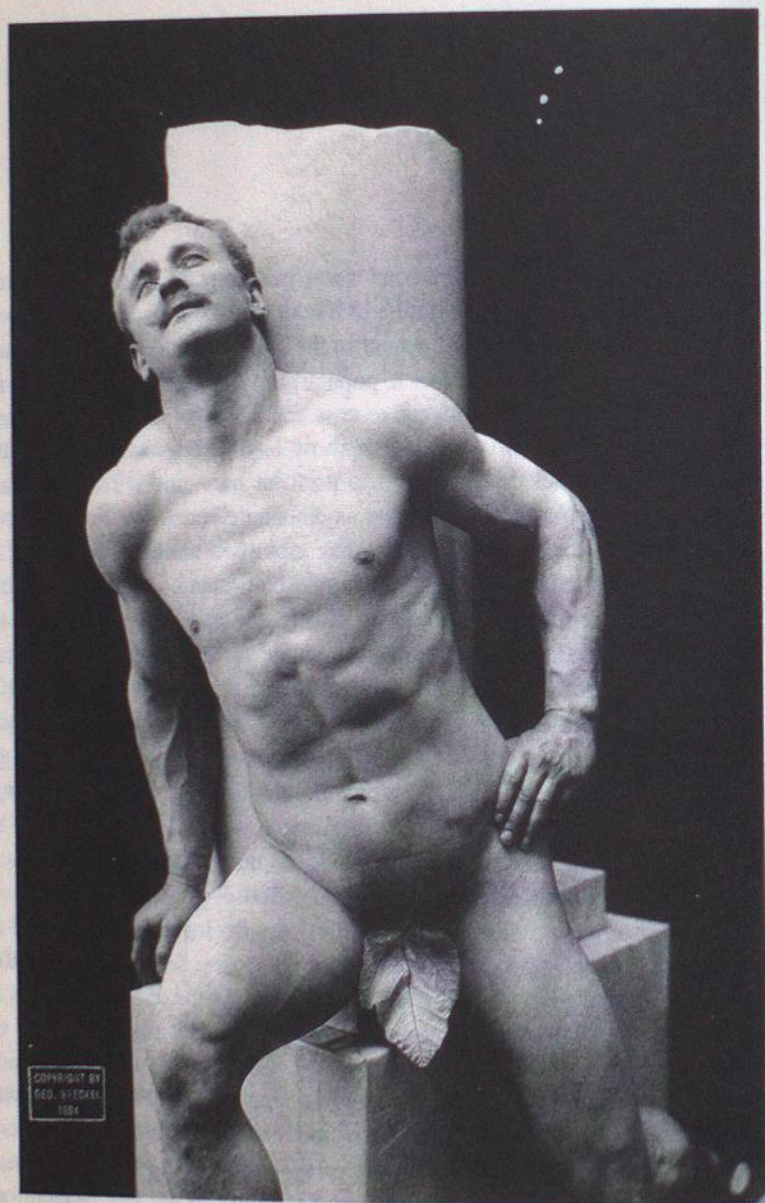


Figure 1 – Eugen Sandow, by George Steckel, 1894. Library of Congress.

richly contradictory sexual discourses that I extrapolate from that flickering windmill on the screen, much less the momentous herald of new representations of masculinity and new enactments of sexual difference and desire. (Figure 1)

Readers are no doubt familiar with Sandow's direct descendants in the cinema, an unbroken parade of bodybuilders facing the camera: from Maciste (Bartolomeo Pagano, the Nubian slave in *Cabiria*, 1914) through George O'Brien, Rudolf Valentino (yes), Johnny Weissmuller, Steve Reeves, Mickey Hargitay... culminating, though not terminating, in Sandow's fellow Teuton Schwarzenegger.³ However, for the purpose of this article on the strongman as sexual image and homoerotic icon, I am turning my gaze away from this pumped-up cinematic genealogy for the time being and looking at photography, specifically the photographs of Sandow and his contemporaries. For it is in the physique photography of the *début-de-siècle* that one can best start in simple uncluttered terms a dissection of the strongman icon as lightning rod of (gay) male desire and the eroticized gaze; it is here one can perceive the first stirrings of the homoerotic construction of the male body, mechanically recorded, in all its...nakedness.

I Athletes vs. Icons

This article is part of a larger study of homoerotic cultural dynamics around sports images which can be traced back to the origins of photography itself in the mid-nineteenth century.⁴ Academic nude photography had included idealized discus-throwers, gladiators and Hercules among its formula icons from its very beginnings (alongside those other homoerotic and imperial figures, noble primitives and pastoral ephebes); on literary terrain, homophile poets Walt Whitman and later A.E.Housman, among others, had celebrated the athlete's undraped body. The homosocial ideal of group exercise, competition, and display was indisputably a nexus of nineteenth century homosexual culture, and there was no shortage of broader social sanctions. Public-school ideals of muscular Christianity inspired some of its earlier institutional settings.⁵ As time went on, its base was democratized in the proliferating institutions of male athletic camaraderie, institutions which, for all their cultural and social differences, formalized male bonding outside of traditional sites of familial, workplace, communal and geographical identification: the YMCA and Scouting in the Anglo-Saxon world were paralleled by various youth movements on the Continent such as the *Wandervögel*, and of course by the apparatus of escalating military mobilization everywhere in the West.

However it was only towards the turn of the century that the ath-

lete could emerge as a homo-erotic icon, in and of himself (rather than the abstract nude male for which athletics had always provided one of several stylized essences). Around that time, cultural transformations around the social conception and function of leisure, sports and the body, as well as refinements in the technology of representation, began to consolidate the athletic body as a focus of emerging subcultures, both sexual and social.

The modern-day revival of the Olympic Games in 1896 symbolized the new institutionalization and commodification of sports and leisure that was altering the place of the (male) body in the social and cultural domain. Professional team sports proliferated, as did their audiences, together with a systematized contest and competition circuit for body-building and non-team sports in the same decade. Of this latter circuit, show-business spinoffs and appendages were numerous: earlier strong-man performance traditions which had thrived throughout the century were gathered into big-business circuits of fairgrounds, music-hall, vaudeville, amusement arcades, and, as we have seen, the cinema. A network of star-athletes soon developed on these circuits, administered with unprecedented professionalism, of which Eugen Sandow was only the best-known. Stars aside, the constituency of fans, audiences, and amateur participants were the crucial context in which the new phenomenon prospered.

The emergence of the male athletic body was not only a socio-cultural sports phenomenon, based on participation, competition, commerce, spectatorship and display. It gradually defined itself also as a phenomenon of visual representation. The photograph of the athlete became a commodity and icon with its own presence, autonomy and value beyond its indexical function. Flesh and blood carnival strongmen had suddenly become photographic idols. Photographers such as Jules Beau appeared who specialized in a new genre, the sports photograph.⁶ In the realms of portraiture and journalism, a new social and civic ideal appeared in the photographic repertory, distinct from its various predecessors: the dignified bourgeois citizen began to be jostled in his position of patriarchal authority by the champion. This undraped, muscular, mature body of the socially mobile proletarian hero encoded new social ideals of populism/popularity, strength, leisure, consumption and triumph rather than civic, cultural or economic accomplishment. Figures like Sandow cultivated public identities as performers, models, merchandisers and idols, as well as athletes. Portraits of athletes documented individual social identities to be sure, but the male body emerged above all as object of mediatic consumption: it not only worked, presided and earned, but also played and competed, and was displayed, recorded, endlessly reproduced, sold, consumed, preserved, admired, emulated — and desired.

Enthusiasts who followed the stars in a rush to the physique studios which began to proliferate in urban centres, did so not only to build their bodies and to socialize with their male comrades, but also to participate in this phenomenon of representation. They consumed photographs and aspired to be photographed themselves, to become photographic objects of admiration. They developed poses and muscles for the camera as much as for any live onlooker. The surviving photos of countless proud but anonymous amateurs are a particularly endearing section of this legacy, innocents proudly staring at the camera as it catches them adrift in the shifting sexual tides of the modern era.

The mediatization of the male athletic body was of course not an isolated phenomenon, but simply one facet of the global homogenization and commodification of popular culture across the surface of modernizing industrial society in the years leading up to World War I. And like many of the emerging cultural forms, the institution of looking at the male body was overwhelming male, in terms of its control, its operation and its constituency. Its mass commodity aspect cannot be overstressed: this traffic in the representation of the male body reached far beyond the constituencies of the pioneering homoerotic photographers of the nineteenth century — aesthetes and pornographers alike, covert and dispersed, subcultural or elite. The means of production and circulation had been perfected: the postcard, newspaper and magazine industries quickly overtook the photographic print trade that had been in existence since mid-century, and transformed the private obsessions of the privileged into modern mass media. Mass circulation newspapers, like the *Police Gazette*, were the first to enshrine athletes and physique stars in the firmaments of pop idolatry, thanks first to engravers and soon to photographers as the printing industry became more technologically sophisticated. As early as the 1880s graphic illustrations of boxers and wrestlers, the clear antecedent of male pinups and physique eroticism, were obligatory components of the popular press.

Towards the turn of the century, specialized physique magazines began to further consolidate this cultural phenomenon of men looking at male nudes. German magazines existed from as early as 1893, and 1898 saw the first publication of English-language equivalents, Sandow's *Physical Culture* (later changed to *Sandow's Magazine*) and *Physical Development*, a British creation of the American entrepreneur Bernarr Macfadden (1868-1955), one of the more flamboyant and influential of the new generation of American physique idol-entrepreneurs, who followed up with an American offspring in 1901, *Physical Culture*, and soon a whole magazine empire. Professor Edmond Desbonnets (1868-1953), a leading French physique impresario, founded his magazine *La Culture physique* in

France in 1904. The book trade also shared the market, with such lavishly illustrated volumes as Desbonnet's *Pour devenir fort: comment on devient athlète* (1909) being typical of productions across North America and Europe.

Perhaps most important was the postcard boom, peaking between 1900 and 1920, when it is said that twenty postcards were sent annually through the mail for every inhabitant of Britain. (Figure 2) The collecting impulse was there from the start: Desbonnet is said to have had a collection of 6000 photos of strong well built men. Dozens of male physique stars were in circulation, thanks to this medium, including such luminaries as Georges Hackenschmidt and Stan Zbysko alongside the sublime Sandow. The muscle superstars are said to have outdrawn the greatest vaudeville stars in the postcard trade.⁷ Certain subcategories of the strong-man postcards, such as pinups of champion wrestlers and boxers in action, were also evolving at the same time, no less open to subcultural appropriation than the solitary bodybuilders. (Figure 3)

As for the newest of the mass media, Sandow was not the only strong-man to be immortalized in the cinema. In fact the first Edison Kinetoscope line had also featured the prizefighters James Corbett and Peter Courtney in perhaps its most sensational product of their first year of operations, as well as Professor Louis Attila, Sandow's legendary teacher and the founder of mod-

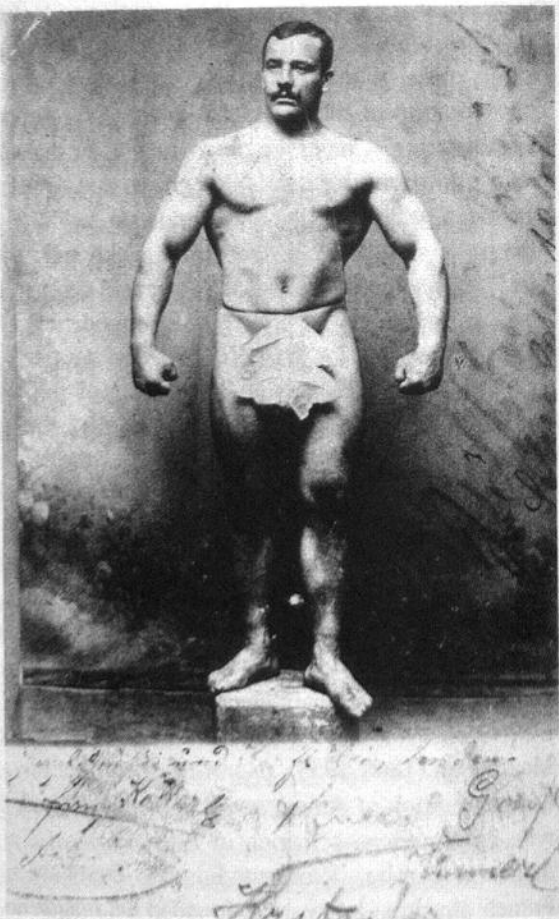


Figure 2 – Anonymous postcard, posted 1902. Uwe Scheid collection.

ern bodybuilding. Two decades later, Bernarr Macfadden produced two expensive films aimed at toning up American youth for entry into the War. Their failure did not deter the irrepressible promoter from further experiments over the next decade.⁸ (This is not to say that ancient artistic media were ignored: several sculptural representations of Sandow's charms were in circulation, including one golden nude complete with genitals, modestly proportioned.)

By the outset of World War I then, Physique Culture had been transformed from a network of local activities into an international cultural industry, a robust branch of popular patriarchal mythology and commerce. How was this new discourse of the male body, what Rouillé calls this new "*corporéité*", also one of the period's proliferating new sexual discourses? How did Physical Culture also reflect a shifting of sexual terrain, lending itself to appropriation by the emerging homosexual constituencies of the *début-de-siècle* West? Specific documentation of the homoerotic articulation and appropriation of the strongman image is as scanty as a fig leaf. Here as elsewhere in social history where subtex-

ALVEREL



Figure 3 – Slightly later than the period covered by this article, this 1920s postcard of a champion boxer was part of a huge collection undertaken in 1920 by a Dutch gay male collector (1900-1989). Private collection, The Hague.

tual and subcultural operations intersect with mainstream culture, the context and the artifacts themselves must unfortunately tell us all.

II Homosexual vs Homosocial

Of the general context, it must be emphasized that the beefcake industry was in exact tandem with the companion cheesecake industry. The strongmen emerged alongside the actresses, female models, fan dancers and burlesque queens, who were depicted in poses only slightly more languorous and costumes slightly more ornate (though much less revealing). Male bodies and the more numerous female bodies were marketed in exactly the same way to the same male gaze in every medium from mail-order photography and postcards to vaudeville and the nickelodeon. There is a record of a female following for such figures as Sandow, but the audience for both phenomena was overwhelmingly male. The cheesecake directly addressed an overtly sexual male voyeurism; the beefcake addressed a male voyeurism and identification of a more covert, sublimated

2a

PHYSICAL CULTURE'S ADVERTISERS—



A recent photograph of
Bernarr Macfadden, the author

MANHOOD AND MARRIAGE

By BERNARR MACFADDEN

A Book that searches your soul—
that enters the most sacred pre-
cincts of your inner life—that
points the way to the vital, pulsat-
ing forces of splendid manhood.

THE PERSONAL
PROBLEMS

OF

The Young
The Weak
The Strong
The Married
The Bachelor
The Middle-Aged

} MAN

This book deals with subjects vital to health, to happiness, and to success. It presents important knowledge on what are known as "hidden topics." It is the aim to supply this scientific information in popular form. It is new in scope, helpful, inspiring, practical, and packed with the kind of information that has been neglected by old-fashioned sex-of-marriage writers. This is the only book covering this subject in this way. It will assist in the acquisition and maintenance of manhood in the best sense. It will aid in acquiring health, vitality, and success, and—what is still more important—happiness in marriage.

SOLVING THE VITAL PROBLEMS OF MEN

"MANHOOD AND MARRIAGE" enters the sanctuary of the most sacred phases of your inner life. It grips you with suggestions that are personal and confidential. It furnishes definite and practical information on vital subjects, pure in themselves, that are frequently surrounded with vulgar mystery.

The problems of men frequently assume tremendous importance. They often become the source of worries that ultimately assume a tragical nature. And the need for the answer to the query, "What shall I do?" often grips the victim with terrifying intensity. It is well, therefore, that conditions and conditions of life, and the solution of them, are often grips the victim

Figure 4—Advertisement from *Physical Culture*, April 1917.

or unconscious nature, simultaneously or alternatively. The star system in and of itself, with its structures of adulation and mystification, was by its very nature erotic. Sandow knew how to exploit this aspect better than his rivals, with his American impresario Florenz Ziegfeld merchandising his attributes no less flamboyantly than he did those of the opposite gender. In short, the mass circulation and consumption of the nude, male or female, was and is automatically a sexual articulation in our culture, no matter how vigorously disavowed. The sexual expressiveness of the male body was no secret, simply obscured by an institutionalized system of silence and look-

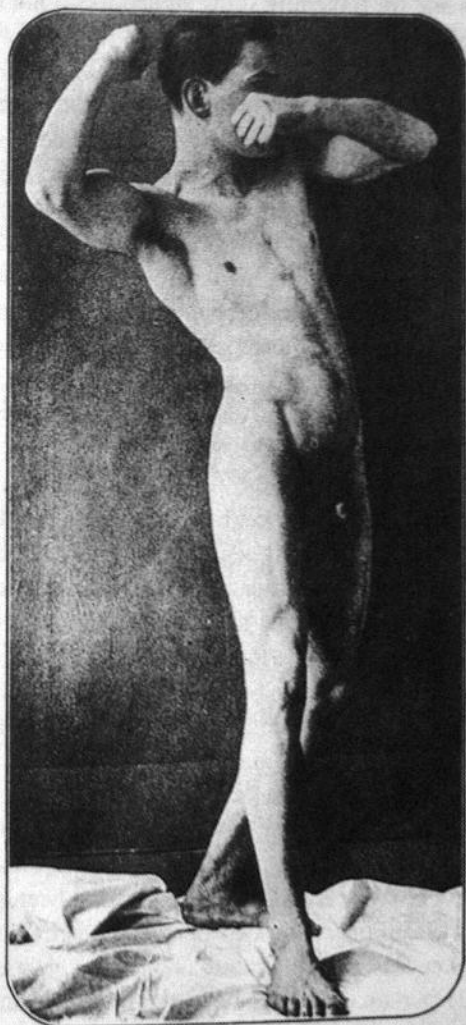


Figure 5 – “Der Boxer,” Lucian von Römer, *Der Eigene* (Berlin), März 1903.

ing the other way.

That sexuality was on everyone's minds there can be no doubt. An obsession with male sexuality was an explicit part of the larger discursive environment of Physical Culture. A widespread male anxiety about potency was transformed by the physique magazines and the tabloids into a profitable mini-industry of literature, gadgets and pharmaceuticals. As for the oft-married Macfadden, there is no reason to doubt his professed heterosexual credentials, but one is struck by the obsessive nature of his melding of the pseudo-medical discourses of male sexuality with those of erotic display and corporal development. He not only enjoyed posing in the nude, for photographers and for travelling show audiences — not to mention anyone in the immediate vicinity — but also wrote frequently on sexology in such books as *The Virile Powers of Superb Manhood* (1903), argued endlessly against prudery, and invented a "peniscope" to "restore male vitality and potency". (Figure 4) This preoccupation with male sexuality that was an adjunct to Physical Culture — this all-male self-improvement cult at the shrine of the phallus and the semen — seems in retrospect deeply homoerotic in its focus, structure, and constituency. Yet an entrenched homophobia also pervades the pages of Macfadden's magazines. Within the closet regime of discursive silence, where, as Eve Sedgwick puts it, "silence is rendered as pointed and performative as speech," how much more telling is disavowal?⁹ Macfadden, who survived at least one obscenity conviction in his career, spared no energy in protesting too much:¹⁰

Physical Culture stands today as the exponent of a cleaner, saner attitude towards the human body; and holds that the prudishness of the past generation was a demoralizing influence and was instrumental in encouraging the secret development of licentious art at the expense of wholesome art. This magazine has published and shall continue to publish photographs of the human body, the purpose of which is to reveal muscular development, athletic activity, and bodily grace and beauty.

One cannot know the precise extent of self-identified homosexuals' participation in the Physical Culture phenomenon, either as practitioners or as constituency. Mere shreds of evidence have been retained, such as the contributions by Wilhelm von Gloeden, Thomas Eakins and other gay photographers to the cult of the athlete, or the participation of individual gay (or bisexual) personages in the Physical Culture movement. One notable example of the latter is the French writer Pierre Loti (*Académie*

française), the celebrity patron of Desbonnet's *Pour devenir fort* (1909), an eccentric orientalist notorious for his interest in drag and makeup and for the sensuality of his romantic/exotic fiction. Loti was a collector of physique photographs and an amateur photographer in his own right, remembered for intriguing studies of sailors bathing in the Bosphorus.¹¹ As for Sandow, two of his most ardent fans were the British gay literati Edmund Gosse and John Addington Symonds, who wrote in an 1889 letter to Gosse of Sandow's most recent fig-leaf portfolio:¹²

The Sandow photographs arrived. They are very interesting, & the full length studies quite confirm my anticipations with regard to his wrists ankles hands & feet. The profile & half-trunk is a splendid study. I am very much obliged to you for getting them for me.

Other evidence of gay participation in the Physical Culture milieu can be inferred in carefully worded classified ads seeking male companionship, liberally sprinkled in the columns of the physique magazines among the more numerous heterosexual overtures (many of which have clear matrimonial intent). The following dignified solicitation in *Physical Culture* is typical:¹³

American bachelor, 48, book lover owning large collection, lover of nature, devoted to open window sleeping, open-air life and hatless existence; solicits correspondence with young men of athletic build and habit, fond of literature and wholesome life.

Finally, one must not overlook the matter-of-fact appearance of Physical Culture iconography in the embryonic gay magazines of the early decades of the century, most notably the German *Der Eigene* (1896-1931). (Figure 5)

Of another order is rare testimony about both lookers and the looked at in the sports milieu from the few memoirs and oral histories of gay men available from the period. "In the gymnasium dressing room I would enjoy seeing the naked forms, but concealed my own." remembered one "androgyne".¹⁴ Xavier Mayne, another "native informant" from the same period, in fact one of our first gay-identified authorities to undertake a comprehensive study of homosexuality, felt qualified to generalize in his own special vocabulary:¹⁵

...let us note that similisexualism is widely manifested in professionally athletic occupations. It is common to circus-riders, tumblers, acrobats, to men who are devoted to sports and professions of high physical dexterity. The "super-virile" theory may be recognized here, the male so emphatically masculine as to repudiate instinctively the feminine. Among "ring" gymnasts often exist lasting

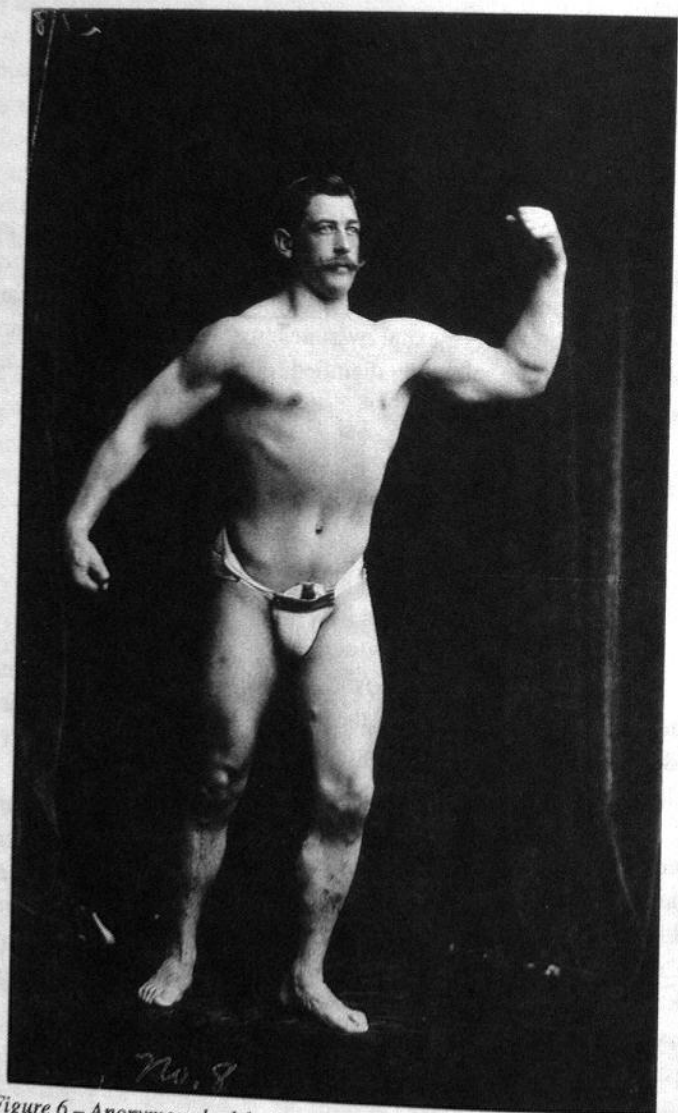


Figure 6 – Anonymous bodybuilder, c. 1900-1910. Library of Congress.

intimacies of this sort. In athletic circles of all social grades, there is more or less uranianism. The Uranian who is not athletic is almost always attracted to the manly symmetry and masterful strength of the circus acrobat. Sometimes this is inverted. In the professional pairings of acrobatic associates a vivid psychic interdependence is



Figure 7 – Photograph by Wilhelm von Gloeden, c. 1900. Private collection.

common... One of the most distinguished of "strong men" and wonder-athletes of the day, whose physique is famed the world over, is similisexual, almost to complete indifference to women. Another great "physical culturist", as also a renowned professional wrestler and athlete, are uranian in their sexual life. In athletic-clubs, scandals of the homosexual kind are not rare. In London, Paris and Berlin, especially, some such have made social convulsions. In "*Turnverein*" organizations, for gymnastics and social intercourse, that are so much an institution of German and Austrian townlife, there have been many such episodes.

Extrapolating from these admittedly minimal hard data, the historian must presume that the homosocial infrastructure and sexual atmosphere of this movement that legitimized the pleasure of looking at male beauty, attracted and sheltered an important (if superficially invisible) gay constituency; furthermore it facilitated all the gradations of homoerotic identification from unconscious same-sex fantasy, through fleeting contact, to entrenched commitment that Kinsey would formalize in his famous scale of 1 to 6 a half-century later. One assumes that conditions already existed in the Physical Culture milieu that would be much better documented in later generations: a safe institutional space for socially legitimate homosexual networking, as well as for the sublimated sexual activities of voyeurism, display, bathing, and communal exertion in intimate same-sex surroundings.

New alibis thus opened up for homoerotic discourses, the athletic alibi soon overtaking the hoary nineteenth century artistic alibi as the principal shelter for homoerotic imagery in the modern age;¹⁶ it is this alibi that eventually stimulated the post-World War II florescence of gay visual culture in the erotic works of a whole generation of physique photographers on the eve of Stonewall, from Bruce of Los Angeles to Hoffman of Edinburgh. This generation's enormous importance in the formation of contemporary gay identities, cultures, politics and sexualities (and — why not? — in the definition of contemporary masculinities across the board) has yet to be fully told. Meanwhile, Physical Culture photography was already contributing to the blurring of boundaries — between licit and illicit codes of corporal representation with their two previously separate protocols, between the representation and enactment of same-sex bonds, between identification and desire as motors of intermale social relationships, between the homosocial and the homosexual.

III Licentious vs Wholesome

Returning to the domain of the text, the actual photographs of the Physical Culture movement must themselves inevitably remain the most palpable but forever mysterious instance of the homoerotic substratum of the strongman cultural phenomenon. In general the majority of the poses are the stern frontal assertions of phallic power that are still all too familiar, the most common poses highlighting the arms. The neo-classical repertory of gestures and props that can be seen in much academic painting and photography of a generation or two earlier is frequently invoked in both the photography and the public strongman performances of the period. Grecian pillars and other props function not only as decor but even as weights. Such photographs typically offer lavish decoration — indeed, fetishization — of the male body through accessories like clubs and the standard posing getup of high sandals and leopardskin trunks.

As for the much abused fig leaf, the coy negotiation of genital modesty is in itself a sexual discourse, both through the fastidious precision of the pose, and the ingenious excess of the substitutes (such as leopard-skin sarongs). In many cases the fanatical detail of post-appliquéed foliage seems to accent the repressed sexuality of the body rather than hide it, drawing attention to the thing forbidden. At the same time, the titillating artificiality itself of the leaves, poses and paint jobs is, to the consumer, an unavoidable articulation of the nudity of the actual photographic session.

Paradoxically, the discourse of the phallus seems to have been heightened by the taboo on the actual representation of the penis. This taboo was class-determined, apparently deemed necessary in a mass medium lacking the legitimizing elite constituency and tolerant alibis of the art photography milieu (where penises were plentiful). The taboo mystified the symbolic centre of male sexuality in ways that the no-holds-barred "art" photographers such as von Gloeden with their unprivileged and unswollen genitals did not usually do. The athlete's arms, taut, rigid, flexed, swollen, interlinked, outstretched or upheld, seem in this absence to acquire the graphic status of phallus surrogate, erectile biceps and all. (Figure 6) At the same time, while most poses stress the bulk of some muscle or other, and many employ the powerful semiotics of folded arms, with their incidental signal of sexual protectiveness, other poses emphasize intimacy with the charisma of the star. Such poses seem to mimic the configurations of access and vulnerability, even tenderness, seen in von Gloeden or in earlier heterosexual piquanterie.

Finally, the stark denotative quality of most of the early physique photos is in sharp contrast to the connotative, aesthetic articulations of the

body by contemporary gay "art" photographers such as von Gloeden or the American Fred Holland Day. In this sense, the physique photos emphatically disavow the erotic nature of the act of photography itself, delegating all erotic signification to the performance and body of the hero. As physique photography would evolve, the insertion of self-conscious aesthetics into the photographic frame and the emergence of photographers with distinctive personal styles — as early as 1930 in the U.S. — would have much to do with the surfacing of the overtly homoerotic sensibility of its modern-day descendant in its golden age of the 1950s.

Conclusion: Strongman vs Ephebe

At the centre of the Physical Culture phenomenon was the image of an artificial and cultivated body in sharp contrast to the image of the male body conveyed by the "art" photographers. For one thing, the mature body type of Physical Culture departs from the pubescent or adolescent type so popular up to this point. The physiculturists' rigid and angular poses contradict the softness, roundness and grace of von Gloeden's setups with their connotations of pre-modern idealization and pastoral nature myths. (Figure 7) At the same time, the spectatorial economy of generational difference is reversed: the photographs' implied spectator transfigures, the adult pederastic longing for dominance over the eternal ephebe modulating into an adolescent hero worship of the hyper-developed mature male body. As the Victorian hierarchy of class, age and culture yields to the submissive adulation of consumer and imitator within twentieth-century "democracy", the aura of grace yields in the pictures themselves to strength, the acolyte to the initiator, the passive to the active, the castrated child to the phallic father, Ganymede to Hercules, effete Socratic pederasty to virile democratic comradeship, Thomas Mann's Tadzio to E.M. Forster's gamekeeper Alec.

These oppositions of ephebe and strongman would constitute a continuing, often overstated dialectic in gay culture and eroticism, traceable right up to Stonewall and beyond (think of the opposition between Mann/Visconti's Tadzio and Genet/Fassbinder's Querelle). Nevertheless it seems to be at this point in history that the ephebe model lost its precedence over the strongman: of the various nineteenth century images available, the mature model of Physical Culture would provide the dominant vocabulary of twentieth century gay eroticism — and of masculinity itself, at least within the hegemonic cultural mainstreams of the Western industrialized world.

The ephebe-strongman pair seems akin to the two competing conceptions of homosexuality — "in-betweenism" vs. "male identification" —

which Richard Dyer traces from early gay sexological theory. Dyer situates these two models in equilibrium in the two major gay male films of the Weimar Republic, the prototype gay rights narrative *Anders als die Anderen* (*Different from the Others*, 1919) and the discrete athletic-alibi "documentary" *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* (*The Way to Strength and Beauty*, 1925). Significantly, Dyer finds that the "in-betweenist" model (or the "Third Sex" or intermediate model, to use 19th Century theoretical constructs) is ultimately "implicitly downgrad(ed)" in the narrative resolution of *Anders* and directly reflective of ideological trends within the gay rights movement of the day.¹⁷ The filmmakers and the ideologues — not to mention other interwar arbiters of gay popular culture — were simply confirming what had been intimated perhaps as far back as Sandow's frantic gesticulations in Edison's Kinetoscope: the "male identification" model — or in iconographical terms the strongman — had arrived.

It is no doubt symptomatic that in our century the predominant homoerotic tradition would arise within the medium par excellence of industrial reproduction and dissemination, photography, and that this medium attached itself to an individualized sport ideally suitable for institutionalization, regimentation, and commercialization. (That cinema should have taken second place to photography in this tradition requires an analysis of factors from demography to the cultural geography of public space to the economic control of the means of production; that the Sandow Kinetoscope would have to wait almost fifty years for its first systematic filmic elaboration [outside of the Hollywood discourse of athlete pinups] is another story.) For better or worse, the modern gay sensibility has responded to and enshrined in the photograph a sport fetishizing individual performance rather than collective effort, consecrated to the mechanical inventory of bodily parts rather than to the grace of co-ordination, dance, or productive work. As a scientific adjunct to this phenomenon, it is no accident that the anthropometric applications of photography by Marey and Muybridge seem most relevant: in comparison to these applications (which not incidentally Linda Williams has shown not only to be based on rigid gender stereotyping but also to be prototypes in their own way of modern sexual representation¹⁸) and to their occasional elaborations by both militarists and industrialists intent on measuring the combat or workplace limits of the male body, and by anthropologists searching for measurements to legitimize imperial power — in comparison to these most ominous dimensions of the new *corporéité*, the bodybuilding photograph seems innocent indeed.

Nevertheless, what better epitome exists than the Physical Culture pinup for the incipient expansion of capitalism into the realms of leisure, sport and erotic expression, for the corporal internalization of our civiliza-

tion's myths of technological advance? What better discursive conduit for corporal desires, anxieties and aspirations coming out of our culture in its throes of commoditization and other modern transformations? What better shelter for the subterfuges, transgressions, and passions of the legion of our ancestors — gay, straight, . . . male — whose sexuality is being constructed at the threshold of our age?

Acknowledgments

For their support of the research of which this article is a result, I am grateful to Concordia University, The Canada Council, *Les Archives gaies du Québec*, *Freunde eines Schwules Museums* in Berlin, the Library of Congress; José Arroyo, Michael Budd, David Chapman, Ross Higgins, Don Mader, Bruce Russell, Paul Snijders, Andréas Sternweiler, and many others.

Thomas Waugh is Associate Professor of Film Studies in the Department of Cinema, Concordia University, Montreal. This article is a version of an excerpt from his book-in-progress, Hard to Imagine: A History of Gay Male Erotic Photography and Film 1850 to 1969. He has also edited "Show Us Life": Toward a History and Aesthetics of the Committed Documentary (New Jersey: Scarecrow, 1984), and has written often on Canadian, Indian, documentary and homoerotic film and video.

¹ Gordon Hendricks, "The History of the Kinetoscope" (1966), in Tino Balio, ed., *The American Film Industry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), pp. 33-45.

² Thomas Waugh, "Gay Male Visual Culture in North America During the Fifties," *Parallelogramme*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Autumn 1986), pp. 63-67; "Hard to Imagine: Gay Erotic Cinema in the Postwar Era," *Cineaction!*, No. 9 (Fall 1987), pp. 65-72.

³ Richard Dyer curated an interesting season, "Built to Show," based on this chronology at London's National Film Theatre in December 1989, with Reeves and Schwarzenegger prominently displayed.

⁴ In fact the larger study is a preliminary version of a chapter from my forthcoming book *Hard to Imagine: The History of Gay Male Erotic Photography and Film 1850 to 1969*.

⁵ This history is well documented in Brian Reade, ed., *Sexual Heretics: Homosexuality in English Literature from 1850 to 1900* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1970).

⁶ André Rouillé and Bernard Marbot, *Le Corps et son image: Photographies du dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris: Contrejour, 1986).

⁷ Two valuable sources for data on this period are David Webster, *Bodybuilding, An Illustrated History* (New York: Arco, 1982), and Leo Gaudreau, *Anvils, Horseshoes and Cannons: The History of Strongmen* (Vol. I and II, apparently self-published, 1975, 1978).

⁸ Robert Ernst, *Weakness is a Crime: The Life of Bernarr Macfadden* (Syracuse University Press, 1991), 87-88. As Ernst recounts, after a 1919 series of exercise films, Macfadden would try his hand in the 1920s at fiction films highlighting physical culture, equally unsuccessful, and finished off the decade by presenting himself in the shorts *Rampant Youth at Sixty* and *Health is the Greatest Wealth*.

⁹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 4.

¹⁰ Bernarr Macfadden, editorial, *Physical Culture*, April 1917.

¹¹ Lesley Blanch, *Pierre Loti, The Legendary Romantic: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983). This standard biography is relatively forthright about Loti's homophile affinities but maddeningly uncritical about the heterosexual persona advanced by his fiction.

¹² John Addington Symonds, *Letters* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), p. 436. For bringing this to my attention, I am grateful to David Chapman, author of a forthcoming definitive biography of Sandow.

¹³ *Physical Culture*, January 1905.

¹⁴ Earl Lind, pseud., *Autobiography of an Androgyne* (New York: The Medical-Legal Journal, 1918; rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1975) p. 103.

¹⁵ Edward Irenaeus Prime-Stevenson (Xavier Mayne, pseud.), *The Intersexes: A History of Similosexualism as a Problem in Social Life* (priv. print. 1908; rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1975), pp. 224-25. Historians frequently encounter "Uranian" as a term for homosexual in nineteenth-century theory; "similosexual" may have been Mayne's invention and is arguably an etymological improvement on the confusing Greek-Latin pun "homosexual".

¹⁶ As often as not, the athletic and artistic alibi would merge, as with the omnipresent reproductions of classical statuary, discus-throwers and the like, that would remain a key term of the gay imaginary for generations. Similarly, it was no accident that, as early as the 1880s, the classical statue of a marathoner in Berlin's Tiergarten became the focus of an important gay cruising area (Andréas Sternweiler, "*Kunst und schwüler Alltag*", in Michael Bollé, ed., *Eldorado: Homosexuelle Frauen und Männer in Berlin 1850-1950. Geschichte, Alltag und Kultur* (Berlin: Frölich & Kaufmann, 1984), p. 76). Of course, the artistic alibi had remarkable staying power despite its submersion by the athletic alibi, supported its own crypto-gay publishing mini-industry in the 1950s and 1960s, and continues to have a clear judicial and cultural weight, as evidenced by the recent Mapplethorpe trial in Cincinnati.

¹⁷ Richard Dyer, *Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 17-27.

¹⁸ Linda Williams, *Hardcore: Power, Pleasure and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 34-57.