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THE PARADOXES OF PARADISIAC NUDITY:  
FASCIST AESTHETICS AND MEDICALISED DISCOURSE  
IN THE 1930'S NUDIST MOVEMENT, HEALTH  
THROUGH NUDE CULTURE

During the latter half of the 1990s Sweden has experienced a rekindled interest for that period in its history when the forces of social engineering and state planning reached their peaks. In her thesis *Sterilisering i folkhemmet* historian Maija Runcis brings attention to the flip side of the Social-Democrats' progressive welfare program. Within a gender-based and loosely conceived Foucauldian framework, she probes the administrative interaction and strategies of the government and the Board of Health regarding cases of "feeble-minded" and "morally inferior" elements, who were perceived to be a growing threat to society. She recapitulates instances of political debate and decision-making, which lead up to the passing of a sterilization law in 1934. At a local level, Runcis then examines how the implementation and application of the law was handled by medical doctors, elected representatives from municipal child care committees, poor relief committees and social workers, when they applied to the Board of Health for surgical action. Among the abundant discourse of protocols, application forms and journal entries, she extrapolates case studies of individuals – predominantly women and young girls – subjected to these acts of interference.<sup>1</sup>

In the following, I will focus on a Swedish nudist movement, Health through Nude Culture /Hälsa genom Nakenkultur (HgN), an association that appears distant from the eugenic project. Newly started in spring 1932, it is depicted in two short films (newsreels SF 753 A-B, 1932) taken at its summer resort in the Stockholm archipelago. As one of the key figures in the discourse on the quality of the Swedish population, the founder of the HgN, medical

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<sup>1</sup> Maija Runcis, *Sterilisering i folkhemmet* (Stockholm, 1998)

professor Johan Almkvist is of particular interest. By juxtaposing his health philosophy, his politics, his involvement with nudist journals and the two films, I want to draw attention to the intertextual links between Swedish state policy and body culture; but first, a brief background of Almkvist's work is required.

## JOHAN ALMKVIST AND THE HgN

A senior venereologist, and the head of his department at Karolinska Institutet, Johan Almkvist also turned his efforts to educating the public, addressing young people in particular, on the problematics of sexuality, hygiene, and marital life. Between 1928-1935 he published many instructive works and articles offering entries into these subjects, such as matrimonial concerns faithfulness and decency in relationships, and proper clothing for the sake of health, convenience and decency.<sup>2</sup>

When Almkvist started the HgN in Stockholm, his basic source of inspiration was the 1895 essay by author Viktor Rydberg, "On Nakedness and Dressing Manners", to which he referred frequently.<sup>3</sup> He was also very much enthused by the German nudist movement, of which the pedagogue Adolf Koch was one of the most influential profiles, leader of several nudist schools, the number of members estimated at 3 million.<sup>4</sup> Almkvist himself adopts a philosophy straddling the above medico-social topics, with health and hygiene as key arguments for nude culture in physical and psychological respects. Not only do clothes hinder the body's ventilation and movements, he says, they also cause unsound erotic titillation, creating an atmosphere of wanton and artificial sensuality between the sexes.<sup>5</sup> In mixed nude parties, young men and women will be hardened against perceiving the naked body as primarily sexual. Conse-

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<sup>2</sup> Johan Almkvist, *Aktuella synpunkter på sexualfrågan* (Stockholm 1928), *Till frågan om folkökningens begränsande* (Stockholm, 1929), *Våra kläder, från hygienisk och sedlig synpunkt*, (Stockholm, 1933), *Hälsa och nakenhet. En socialetisk studie* (Stockholm, 1932), *Den framtida familjeläkaren. Tankar kring en ny social läkareverksamhet* (Stockholm, 1931), *Kärlekens ansvar. En etisk upplysningskrift tillägnad ungdomen och dess uppfostrare* (Uppsala, 1935), *Trohet och otrohet. Ett sexuell problem* (Stockholm, 1934), *Sexuell kultur* (Stockholm, 1933).

<sup>3</sup> Viktor Rydberg "Om nakenhet och klädselsätt. (Med anledning av striden om Oscar Björcks frismålningar i operakällaren. (1895)" in *Viktor Rydbergs. Samlade skrifter. Singoalla, uppsatser, barndomsminnen, tal, m.m.* (Stockholm, 1943), 261-284.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Toepfer, *Empire of Ecstasy: Nudity and Movement in German Body Culture, 1910-1935* (University of California Press, 1998), 36.

<sup>5</sup> Almkvist, *Våra kläder...*, 9-12, 21.

quently, widespread nudity will restore innocence and beauty to the body, and wipe away shame, a degenerated construction of Western society. Almkvist envisions a coming generation of level-headed, responsible, naturally and moderately sexualised men and women. Furthermore, the absence of clothes will improve personal hygiene, care of the body, and consequently, health. Above all, sunbathing, swimming and gymnastics will strengthen and enhance the mental and physical well-being of the nudists – simultaneously keeping their minds off sexual matters.

There is not much film footage to be found on the HgN; two short newsreels remain. The first of them (SF 753A, 1932) begins with Johan Almkvist's introductory speech on camera, where he briefly presents the goals of the newly started movement by contrasting the stressful and decadent life of urban existence with the hearty and healthy simplicity of nudist life. He is also careful to point out to the viewer that "nudity is not an end in itself, only a means" to achieve greater health and well-being. The following scene shows a possible HgN enthusiast bathing his feet before going to the archipelago. Initially, this part is accompanied by cheerful music, but just before the subtitles introducing the sequences of the nudists' resort appears, it is cut abruptly, and taken up again on a dramatically menacing note. Then, as the first image of a sun-glistening water line fades up, the score slows down and changes to a more restrained, tense key. As the first nudists cross the image, the music changes again to a romantically innocently and hearty strain, which continues for the rest of the film.

On the level of intentional discourse, viewers are given explanatory subtitles; in accordance with ruling norms of newsreels shot outdoors at this time, direct dialogue is more often than not excluded. Instead, there is most frequently music, postsynched or other. Almkvist's introductory comment and the intertitles strive to contain any possible association with sexuality in the film's images; they summarise the healthy goals previously advocated by him, stating that the movement has made an exception from its rule against photographing for this film. Yet, as the viewers are about to see the participants, the musical score appears to work against such intentions. Moreover, the film's pace slows down radically as they are about to appear, enhancing the curiosity for nudity. How then, are the viewers to be induced to look at the film (paying attention and interest) without gazing voyeuristically? At first, the HgN participants are mostly shown at a distance, from behind, or against the light, as if to spare viewers from a too sudden confrontation. Little by little there are

closer framings of them, still often in poses turned away from the camera. However, in scenes where gymnastics, agility and acrobatic exercises are performed, the takes are somewhat closer.

The first of the films imply that participation in the HgN's get-togethers on summer Sundays are open to those interested. The imagery of the film, however, puts this into question, as the camera mostly focuses a few handsome men and women singled out to demonstrate agility and strength. What is striking in the footage is a film style that precedes that of Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* (1936); the camera lingers on young slim bodies in athletic poses, bodies performing gymnastics or acrobatics, on arched backs and arms stretched up for accentuation, bodies bathed in sunlight, often taken from low angles, rendering their figures statuesque and monumental. Visible is a dynamic between the de-dramatisation of nudity, the often discrete depiction of it, and the aesthetized *mis-en-scène* of it.

The second of the films (SF 753B, 1932) implicitly reveals compositional aspects about the first one, as many of the takes from the first initially appear to be repeated or continued in the second. In the last sequence of the first film, a man and a woman walk into the water hand in hand; in the second, we see them coming out of the water again – in two almost identical takes. Another sequence shows a young athletic man balancing a woman's body on one hand; he is shown trying a few times. In the first film only the successful lift is included. Apparently, these scenes may be those discarded from the finished version of the first film.

Turning this hermeneutics of suspicion on around, we can note that there are a few comparably long takes in the second film that are altogether absent from the first: a number of scenes showing group gymnastics. Here, the framings are somewhat closer than in the first film, showing the participants' bodies head on, often facing the camera. We see a mixed group, following the militantly performed body movements of a male leader. One of the most interesting scenes of the footage shows a slender couple shot against the light, standing face to face on a steep hill. At an off-screen signal they slowly perform the sun-greeting two times.

We will never know if such scenes *were* discarded. Almkvist often claims that the human body is shown to its greatest advantage in gymnastics; one of his most fervent arguments for nude culture, is his professed admiration for well-proportioned, beautiful bodies. Yet, the takeouts imply that the film was

thoroughly directed, rehearsed and edited, as if it may have been considered too offensive for a general, uninitiated audience.

In his writings on nudism Almkvist expects that transgressions of decency will be very unlikely: “As a consequence of the large number of people who meet at the bathing and gymnastic resorts, and of the strict and good spirit that will prevail in these places [...] sexual advances between men and women would be very difficult to carry out”.<sup>6</sup> These lines reveal that the paradisiac promise of nudity also carries with it an interjacent and internalised function of surveillance – in a panoptic sense. Neither material agency nor architecture is needed to observe the participants in the manner of Bentham’s Panopticon, an ingeniously built, ring-shaped prison, with large-windowed cells facing a circular surveillance tower in its midst, giving the guards full and constant view of the inmates. Here, the guarantees for chastity are already given in the bodies’ visibility and the preordained spaces for, and limited choices of interaction. Even if participation in the HgN couldn’t very well be likened to imprisonment – indeed it aims at the opposite – “visibility is a trap”.<sup>7</sup>

Within a Foucauldian framework, then, Almkvist’s movement could be situated in the intersection of *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*. In the circulation and exploitation of punishable bodies in prison systems and institutions, Michel Foucault sees mercantile micro-societies with their own imperatives of economic and mental profitability. Criminals not only create currency by the work of their hands, they embody it (bodies-as-currency) doubly, as they must constantly prove their valour (yield interest) to their guardians.<sup>8</sup> In a similar manner – judging from the discourses and practices surrounding the nudist – he/she is subjected to an implicit imperative of making disciplined, productive use of his/her body – in ways that are clearly visible. “The disciplinary body has its architecture, its anatomy, its mechanics, its economy”.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, the statement that the agencies of power causes sexuality “to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail” has a double bearing, firstly on Almkvist’s writings on “the sexual problem”, with its recurrent mapping and categorisation of sexuality, characteristic of his medical focus, and so central to the project of societal improvement enacted through

<sup>6</sup> (my transl.) Almkvist, *Hälsa...* 13-14.

<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, *Övervakning och straff* (*Surveiller et punir*, Editions de Gallimard, 1974) (Lund, 1998), 233-4

<sup>8</sup> Foucault, *Övervakning...*, 327

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 196

the family. Secondly, it has a bearing on his response, when exposed to public moral outcry.<sup>10</sup> The logic of productivity and surveillance expressed in *Discipline and Punish*, has its counterpart in *The History of Sexuality*; both systems are explicitly conditioned by the automatized circulation of disciplined *and* deviant subjects. Such a relational system also surfaces in this context. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault's statement that production rather than repression is the procedure which holds sexuality in check, is brought to the fore in Almqvist's dual position. In his former function, he is one of these powerful agencies, in the latter, he has to answer to them. The more pressure, the more detailed the accounts on the nudist's activities are required to be. No sign of sexuality is too small to pass unheeded, and is countered by professions of health, beauty and the turning back to Hellenic ideals. The freedom promised by nudity demands an increasing amount of counter-sacrifices, bodily discipline and hardships that increase with the critique levelled at nudism. The properly trained nudist must demonstrate a readiness to complicate, subdue or kill the pleasure of nudity by these practices, in order to hinder the critical eye and imagination to "hit" the bare skin.

This tendency is particularly noticeable in photo illustrations in contemporary Swedish nudist journals. Judging from the photographic material in *Solvännern/ Sun Friend* (1935-37), but even more from that of *Natur och Hälsa/ Nature and Health* (1933-42), *Naket/Naked* (1934-36) and *Naket-Liv /Naked Life* (1936-47), the nudists are forever placed in an ordeal of implicit criticism. The photos of classical poses, exercises, winter bathing; skiing, the carrying out of everyday tasks indoors – all point to an endlessly perpetuated desire for legitimacy. As role models, the photos encourage you to forget your nakedness; simultaneously, their imagery betrays a perceivable undercurrent of anxiety that a truly indolent paradisiac nudity may after all lead to sin.

## SOCIAL ENGINEERING

[t]here emerged a completely new technology of sex; new in that for the most part it escaped the ecclesiastical institution without being truly independent of the thematics of sin. Through pedagogy, medicine, and

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 18. See the journals *Dagbräckning*, "Svensk Nakenkultur...", 16, Nr 2, 1932, *Natur och Hälsa* and the women's magazine *Husmodern*, "Nude culture has suffered a defeat/Nakenkulturen har lidit nederlag", Nr 37, 14, 46, 1932, for reports on the reception of Almqvist's movement.

economics, it made sex not only a secular concern but a concern of the state as well; to be more exact, sex became a matter that required the social body as a whole, and virtually all of its individuals, to place themselves under surveillance. New too for the fact that it expanded along three axes: that of pedagogy, having as its objective the specific sexuality of children; that of medicine, whose objective was the sexual physiology peculiar to women; and last, that of demography, whose objective was the spontaneous or concerted regulation of births.

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*<sup>11</sup>

Although as it is not possible here to enter deeply into the genealogy of eugenics and its practices, a short sketch of the political background could be useful. How is it that eugenics gained such a following in this context? And where is Johan Almkvist and his movement situated in this schema of intertwining discourses on embodied politics? As to the ideological underpinnings of eugenics advocates in 1920s Europe and Sweden, Maija Runcis points out that nearly all different shades of political opinions shared a positive view of its value, although with varying objectives: conservatives and nationalist saw eugenics as a means to hinder the spreading of hereditary mental illness and tuberculosis, and as a preventive measure against the influx of unsound foreign blood; feminists supported eugenics and the legalisation of contraceptives as ways of diminishing the amount of abortions – with the aim of ameliorating the social position of mothers generally; for leftist radicals and socialists, it was conceived of as a weapon against poverty. If hereditary diseases and unwanted mental predispositions could be eliminated, social progress would gain momentum. From their vantage point, Runcis observes, the hygienical aspects were interpreted literally: “[they]... resembled a social hygienism, which was more about purity and cleanliness, but which could easily be conflated with race-biological ideas about social environment generating heredity.”<sup>12</sup> The Social Democrats, with their application of scientific expertise and rational state planning, and with Alva and Gunnar Myrdal as leading figures of social reform, formulated their advocacy for eugenics as acts of far-reaching societal solidarity.<sup>13</sup>

Politically, Johan Almkvist belonged to the conservatives. According to him, family values were on the wane, stating that sexual relationships must be undertaken with renewed responsibility and dedication, since “family love is

<sup>11</sup> Foucault, *History...*, 116

<sup>12</sup> (my transl.) Runcis, *Sterilising* 41, 63

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 50f, see also Robert Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis* (Harvard University Press, 1988), 15ff

the nucleus of the strength and happiness of a people".<sup>14</sup> One way of securing that young families get proper advice, is to educate family doctors. As they will know the family members intimately, no sexual or health problems need be overlooked. Additionally, frequent prophylactic observation keeps the family provider healthy, thus being a preventive measure against future costs for society.<sup>15</sup>

Careful steps must be taken to avoid future problems with offspring, Almkvist claims; therefore, medical tests before marriage should make sure that bride and groom-to-be do not carry hereditary diseases.<sup>16</sup> In a short newsreel (SF 712, 1931) he solemnly urges young women and men to revive the family spirit, and above all, to subject themselves to medical examination to see to it that they are not afflicted by "sexual abnormalities" that may injure their future marital life. He also states that large, poor families should be discouraged from getting more children, and tired mothers be offered sterilization. "Morally degenerated" and criminal elements must be sterilized, so as to keep them from passing on antisocial predispositions.<sup>17</sup> As Runcis' as well as other less recent Swedish works show, Almkvist's views were anything but controversial.<sup>18</sup> The Institute for Racial Biology in Uppsala, a government-supported institution, was founded well over a decade earlier, and its founder, medical professor Herman Lundborg, had authored theories of eugenics and racial research for which he had received public attention as early as in the 1910s.<sup>19</sup>

As one out of six contributors to an 1934 anthology on "the sexual problem" Almkvist gives vent to his expectations regarding the new sterilisation law soon to be passed by the government: "Among those specific measures to be taken, a sensible sterilisation law is required, which can hinder the asocial elements from breeding as far as it is possible. Fortunately, such a law [...] will soon be passed."<sup>20</sup> Similar views were expressed by the Myrdal couple. In their book *Population in Crisis*, issued shortly after the law's coming into force, they

<sup>14</sup> (my transl.) Almkvist, *Kärlekens ansvar...*, 15

<sup>15</sup> Almkvist, *Den framtida...*, 4-5

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 65

<sup>17</sup> Almkvist, *Till frågan ....*14-15.

<sup>18</sup> See Jan Larsson, *Hemmet vi ärvde. Om folkhemmet, identiteten och den gemensamma framtiden*, (Stockholm 1998), Birgitta Svensson, *Bortom all ära och redlighet. Tattarnas spel med rättvisan* (Kristianstad, 1993)

<sup>19</sup> Herman Lundborg, *Det svenska institutet för Rasbiologi* (Stockholm, 1922), Runcis, 41

<sup>20</sup> Almkvist, "Sexuallivets hygien, in *Sex läkare om sexualproblemet*", by professors Johan Almkvist, Olof Kinberg, Wilhelm Wernstedt, John Orlow, Alfred Petré (Stockholm 1934), 94, (my transl.)



state: "What lies ahead is evidently the radical winnowing out of highly unviable individuals, which can be achieved by sterilization."<sup>21</sup>

Assessing Johan Almkvist's character in two posthumous texts, his medical colleague Gerda Kjellberg describes him as a remarkably decent and sensitive man, but "too naïve for words".<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, he appears in the function of grand master giving the inaugural speech when the nationalist society the Swedish Order holds its first meeting at the Concert Hall in 1929:

HAIL SWEDEN! [he raises his right hand in fascist salute] In our striving we want to build on the foundation that former generations of our Swedish people have laid [...] We in our turn should then hand down this work of ours to coming generations for further development; thus we take care of our future. For the sake of our cultural progress we must therefore adhere closely to our forefathers' deeds, value them and make use of their potential. Our deeds must be carried out in reverence of the forefathers. And therefore HAIL THE MEMORY OF OUR FOREFATHERS! [raised hand] [...] We can rejoice in our forefathers' beautiful, Swedish deeds. We should be reverently grateful for them. Because we can proudly say: WE ARE SWEDISH! [...] We want to keep our culture purely Swedish, to love it as Swedes, to assert our Swedish character and essence, [...] to promote our hereditary feats of valour. Therefore we profess: WE WANT TO REMAIN SWEDISH IN A FREE AND INDEPENDENT SWEDEN!<sup>23</sup>

He was furthermore a warm supporter of the society's aristogenics research (the genealogy of nobility), performed by his Order brother Sven Olsson.<sup>24</sup>

As already suggested, Almkvist was a complex persona, something that becomes particularly visible in his perspectives on family politics. While advocating the legalisation on sterilisation, abortion and contraceptives on a general basis, he fears that only enlightened middle and upper class families will make use of them, thus leaving the floor open to the procreation of the "antisocial elements" – which will damage the quality of the nation stock.<sup>25</sup> On

<sup>21</sup> Alva & Gunnar Myrdal, *Kris i befolkningsfrågan* (my transl.) Stockholm, 1934, 217, see also pp. 217-226. On the Myrdal couple and sterilization, see Larsson, *Hemmet ...*, 134-140, and Svensson, 30. Medical doctor Hugo Toll is altogether more blatantly racist and cynic in his book *Åktenskapet och släktarvet. Läkare, veterinär, och rasbiolog-synpunkter*, arguing that the "natural selection" in society take its course (i.e. letting the "inferior" die), (Stockholm, 1931), 20-21

<sup>22</sup> Gerda Kjellberg, *Hänt och sant* (Stockholm, 1951), 141ff, "Personliga intryck av några av Dermatologiska sällskapets första medlemmar" in Svenska Dermatologiska sällskapets festskrift, 50-årsjubileet 1951 (Stockholm, 1951), 19f.

<sup>23</sup> (my transl.) *Swenska ordens skrifterserie 1. Tvänne tal. Av Stormästaren, Professorn, m.m. Johan Almkvist, vid Svenska Ordens höstfest å Konserthuset*, (Stockholm, 1930), 2-3

<sup>24</sup> A Frederiecksson (pseud. for Sven Olsson) *Swenska Ordens skrifterserie 3. Blått Blod. En inledning till Nordisk raskunskap* (Linköping, 1933)

<sup>25</sup> Almkvist, *Sexuell...* 95ff

the other hand, with a background as an Salvation Army doctor working with prostitutes, Almkvist professes at times surprisingly progressive views on sexuality. In discussing steps to be taken against prostitution, he says that the customers and the sexual double standards of Swedish society is the problem, not the prostitutes themselves: "The suppression of women's freedom always leads to increased prostitution".<sup>26</sup> And despite his outspoken preoccupation with the family, he states that pre-nuptial sex should be sanctioned, and that homosexuality be decriminalised.<sup>27</sup> Whether his views were believed to be influential or not by his contemporaries, it is still surprising that Runcis does not include him in her outline of the supporters of eugenesis. A passage from his writings on sexual culture appears in her discussion on implementing the sterilisation laws, but his name is mentioned only in a note.<sup>28</sup>

## THE BODY AESTHETIC

As previously shown, the HgN emerges at a time when medico-aesthetic perspectives form an established part of public discourse, with Johan Almkvist as one of its driving forces. In order to highlight some of the contemporary arguments for body culture, I will have a quick look at the aesthetic-political contexts in which the HgN is situated. Apart from the German influence, one probable source of inspiration for Almkvist himself was *Gymn* (1928-32), a body culture journal. It was issued by the wealthy Carl-Ernfrid Carlberg, who was then becoming the major financial supporter of the Swedish Nazi movement – which he also remained for several decades to come. It offered edifying articles on gymnastics and the revival of Hellenic ideals, interspersed with sheet music of Gymnic hymns and marches, poems and reproductions of art.<sup>29</sup> Its manner of address was solemn and instructive, its layout austere. The cover frequently sported a reproduction of a sculpture of a manifestly heroic male figure. The editorial of its first issue reads:

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<sup>26</sup> Almkvist, *Kärlekens...*, 43, 46ff

<sup>27</sup> Almkvist, *Sexuell...*, 37ff, 88

<sup>28</sup> Almkvist, "Sexuell kultur på naturvetenskaplig grund. Ett försök att bringa överensstämmelse mellan människans natur och sederegler" in Runcis, 120, 306

<sup>29</sup> The most frequently shown works are by artists Carl Eldh, Christian Ericsson, Olof Ahlberg, Carl Milles, Carl Fagerberg.

In this journal, the Gymnic token presents the three words: Health, Character, Beauty. Among ideals, there can be no greater than these. To seek them with reverence and sincerity is a worthy and liberating endeavour. These eternally lasting concepts have been corrupted in our time [...] A world war has ravaged Earth, it has mutilated bodies and spoiled the work of millions of hands. But above all it has devastated the minds. Yet! At this very moment a cry rises from countries and peoples. Reaction! Renaissance! Our wounds heal, our backs straighten, our yearning seeks something beneath and beyond matter. [...] What we seek could be called culture, beauty, art, religion, the names themselves are insignificant. If we are to prevent Western society from ruin due to physical, ethical and egotistic slackness, a radical improvement of character is necessary [...] the spiritual spring must burst forth from healthy bodies, clear minds, good hearts.<sup>30</sup>

The publication hails a new, ethically and biologically superior human type, ennobled by physical training. Editor Carlberg's article "Under the Gymnic Sign" sketches a programme targeting a young readership, in which medicine and prophylactic health care, gymnastic culture, and above all, where the arts and sciences should interact through information, exhibitions and festive events. This first issue also offers the reader "Race Biological Perspectives", an article by eugenicist Herman Lundborg.<sup>31</sup> Considering the affinities between the ideological projects of the Gymnastic movement and that of Johan Almkvist, it is not surprising that he appears as one of the its editorial co-operators in 1929.<sup>32</sup>

In Swedish journals on nude body culture one notes a consistent striving for legitimization through art discourse. This is most prominent in the two short-lived publications *Solvännan* and *Naket/Naket – Sedligt?!*. The latter employs a mix of poetry, articles and reproductions of art, compressing and popularising the style of *Gymn*. Photographs of Swedish or foreign nudists are often juxtaposed with pictures of sculptures or paintings of nudes in order to make a cultural-aesthetic point. In the following quote, the comparison is employed to remove the sense of shame associated with nudity:

Look [...] at the artist Olof Ahlberg's sculpture "Father and Son" [...] Then look at H. Gnest's photography "Father and Daughter" [...] If [the] photograph is to be considered indecent, because it is a picture of naked people, then [...] Ahlberg's sculpture must be judged accordingly. [...] is it the sculpture as such that is indecent, or is it the photographic

<sup>30</sup> Carl-Ernfrid Carlberg, "Några ord som anmälan." in *Gymn. Tidskrift för Gymnisk kultur. Organ för Gymniska förbundet*, 1928:1, 2, (my transl.)

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-10

<sup>32</sup> He also writes in their winter issue in 1930, Almkvist, "Nöjeskultur och sexualliv", *Gymn* 1930:3, No 1, 26-30

reproduction of it? If we were to admit that none of these should cause offence, then we must also acquit the photography of any such quality. If legal steps should be taken to prevent the publication of nude pictures, then it is also necessary to get clothes for the statues.<sup>33</sup>

The strategy of appropriating images and key-words among journals appears as a network of cross-referential codes giving internal support. As in the nudist film footage, certain poses, like the sun-greeting, are recurrently reproduced. *Solvännern* employs an active strategy, repeatedly claiming that nudity, and by association, nude culture, not only is an integrated and accepted part of art history, but has the potential to revitalise and revolutionize the art world from within, with nude models as its activists. Erik Schlyter writes:

They want to be depicted as they walk and stand, indoors and outdoors, in activity and in repose, at work and at play, in everyday life and at festivals. No dead art [sculpture] in the world can possibly compete with Nature's own. It will be the invaluable mission of the camera to realise the dream of live art. [...] There shall be great, inspired artists, who will take place behind the camera, who will mould their naked human material, and build tremendous artworks of beauty and perfection.<sup>34</sup>

The introductory comment of this as well as of the following issues of the album subsequently announces its photographs as a good substitutes for live models.<sup>35</sup>

Almkvist himself also repeatedly seeks argumentative support for his movement in art, mainly from classical aesthetic ideals, comparing the nudity of "primitive" peoples to that of the ancient Greeks: "[T]he naked primitives live in an undeveloped natural state, while the Greeks had developed a culture of nudity".<sup>36</sup> He advocates the potential for Swedish nude and natural nobility in the Hellenic tradition: "What if our time could awaken a similar sensibility for the beauty of the body, and develop artistic ability! The evidence of the importance the Greeks accorded to nudity, is best shown by looking at the great philosopher Plato, who thought that nudity should be commonly practised and sanctioned by law."<sup>37</sup> Western corporeality – performed in gymnastics, dancing and athletics – signifies a cultivation and acculturation of the body, a level which "the primitives" cannot aspire to. This process roughly involves adorning the body with two overlapping layers: the first involves the

<sup>33</sup> "Sedligheten i fara?" in *Naket – Sedligt?* (anon.) (Göteborg, 1934.) 8., my transl.

<sup>34</sup> Erik Schlyter, "Levande konst och död" in *Naket-Liv* No. 3, 1938, my transl.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 3

<sup>36</sup> Almkvist, *Hälsa...*, 26.

<sup>37</sup> Almkvist, "Sexuallivets hygien", 106, my transl.

aforesaid desexualisation; the second is the Hellenic turn, where the body is appropriated and appreciated as an aesthetic object.

According to Lynne Frame, contemporary Weimar schools in neo-classical *Körperkultur* for women concentrated on medico-aesthetic “remedies” to what they perceived as modern society’s neglect of the female body and mind. Their programs aimed at restoring feminine grace of the *Vollweib* (the complete woman) in movement and appearance, and to induce women to unlearn coquettish vanity, so damaging to their health. They staged a literal “recultivation” of women’s reproductive, caring capacities, and of their roles as reproducers of ideal gender and family values for future generations.<sup>38</sup> Referring to the UFA educational film *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*, she writes: “The widespread pursuit of sports, dance, and, above all, body-conditioning programs according to the various methods of the neoclassically styled *Körperkultur* schools of expressive gymnastics and dance would pave the way to [...] a harmonious proportion of the body [that] was the ideal of the ancient Greeks.”<sup>39</sup>

In his book on German nude body culture, *The Empire of Ecstasy: Nudity and Movement in German Body Culture, 1910-1935* Karl Toepfer notes an explicit, temporal ambivalence at work in the signifying practices of Weimar modernity; through the embodied conflation of innocence with maturity and evolution, modernity is perceived *as* innocence. Through an elaborate framework of metaphysical philosophy: “Nacktkultur projected an ambiguous political identity because it treated the body as a double sign: on the one hand, it presented nudity as a return to an eternal primeval; on the other [...] it regarded modern identity as an unprecedented condition of nakedness.”<sup>40</sup> These practices tried to break down the traditional mind and body split, “subject and object, self and world”, using the body as a universal “manifestation of modernist desire”.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Lynne Frame, “Gretchen, Girl, Garçonne? Weimar Science and Popular Culture in Search of the Ideal New Woman”, in *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, ed. Katharina von Ankum (University of California Press, 1997), 29-31.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 29

<sup>40</sup> Toepfer, 32.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, 7, 31.

## CONCLUSION

What is in an uncanny way interesting in the encounter between Almkvist's texts and the films, is that it is based on racial hygiene on the one hand, and that it is supposedly egalitarian and innocent on the other. Hygiene and aesthetics were the overdetermining concepts for the HgN, legitimating activities that became morally questionable to its contemporaries because of their suspected sexual content, and to posterity because of their fascist ideology. By way of key-images and -words (health, exercise, aesthetic selection) the films bear traces of Almkvist's eugenic project, but they do not simply illustrate it. The iconographical impact in terms of bodiliness, or nakedness, rather, show a waywardness that neither comment nor intertext can contain. Yet, an explicitly chaste space for nude corporeality was prescribed, where it underwent disciplined drill. Speaking with Foucault again, the collective activity, and the hypervisibility of them, imply that surveillance was literally incorporated, or at least that it should be, according to Almkvist.

Paradoxically enough, the movement's representation and treatment of the naked body, simultaneously aspired to set free and take authoritative control of it. But not only was the promise of freedom held out by the removal of clothes belied by surveillance, it also carried with it that grain of punishment that Foucault so compellingly conceptualises in the technologies of power. Moreover, as medicine, hygienism, welfare policy and aesthetics joined forces in this uncanny symmetry held together by the versatile application of hygiene – both as practice and metaphor – the acuteness of his observation about the close conceptual link between curing, helping and destroying deviant elements is again brought to our attention.<sup>42</sup>

In his discussion of the great number and varieties of German nude culture, Karl Toepfer says that far from all German nudist movements had fascist overtones; but regardless of their politics, the Nazis brought most of their activities to a halt in 1933.<sup>43</sup> As to the discourse on eugenics and aesthetics in Almkvist's writings, his position in the Swedish Order and his philosophy regarding nude culture was clearly influenced by German predecessors, and apparently by fascism.

I guess that the conceptual investment in history and classical aesthetics were central to the legitimisation of nudity in modern society during this period.

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<sup>42</sup> Foucault, *Övervakning*, 346

<sup>43</sup> Toepfer, 36.

If we can speak of an aura apart from artefacts, the bodies in nude culture underwent a process of re-auratification, more worldly than in a Benjaminian sense, yet they acquired semantic layers, screening them from sheer and blatant nakedness.

