

[Title] Sunlit Dancers: The Body Culture Photography of *UHU* Magazine

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[Abstract] The German photo-illustrated magazine *UHU*, launched in 1924, was known for its risqué photography of the female nude. These photos offered, however, more than mere titillation: images of pastoral nudes, and of naked dancers, were a sublime expression of *UHU*'s cult of youth and physicality, and of visual beauty in the natural and manmade world. Significantly, the magazine's eclectic visual culture – which also embraced photographs of male gymnastics and of children – inflected the ideological conflicts that centred on the unclothed body in this period. The article describes how contrasting ideas of the body, and of social order, are symbolically expressed in poses and pictorial settings. In particular, the grouping of figures, in geometric and informal 'human patterns', speaks to a fundamental dichotomy in Weimar modernism: the divide between machine-based (rationalist) ideologies, and 'spiritualized' visions of an organic social order. *UHU*'s sunbathers and expressive dancers embodied the dynamic tensions of the new technological society – tensions which would resolve, with drastic consequences, in the following decade.

Sunlit Dancers: The Body Culture Photography of *UHU* Magazine

The dark, chaotic side of Western technocracy has damned the body, branded it with hell and sin. But in the luminous side, the body stands anew in unconcealed clarity. Exposed and naked is our thinking. Now we comprehend the body, uncaged and without veiling insinuations. Radiant bronze skin mirrors the light of the Olympian sun with the same pure sobriety as the sparkling pistons of newly formed machines.

–Wolfgang Graeser, *Körpersinn*, 1927

Wolfgang Graeser's hymn to the modern body encapsulates the duality and ambivalence of Weimar responses to technological society. The physical body, argues Graeser, has been suppressed as the "dark" inverse figure of modernity, the locus of its "chaotic" erotic energies; the new "luminous" age, by contrast, reaches toward unity, embracing both technology and the idealized body as the twin "radiant" products of machine-age perfectibility.¹ Describing a symbolic movement from darkness to light, in which both prudish and erotic responses to nudity are dissipated, Graeser redefines the modern body as spectacular object, whose symbolic meanings are "exposed" to the sensitive viewer. Weimar body culture, in this account, seeks expression not in the distantiated modes of *depiction* – painting or sculpture, for example – but in *performance*: the body's physical presence is demanded, both for the enactment of modernity's secular rituals and as the visual embodiment of its new potentialities. As Tim Armstrong argues, the body's capacities and gendered identities were subject, at this period, to radical reformulation: the body was "re-energized, re-formed, subject to new modes of production, representation, and commodification".² The spectacular displays of the youthful, unclothed and semi-clothed bodies that characterized the Weimar era were

¹ Wolfgang Graeser, *Körpersinn (Body Sense)* (1927), quoted in Toepfer, *Empire of Ecstasy*, 31.

² Armstrong cites Raymond Williams's idea of consciousness as a movement between language and physicalization: "the true range is from information and description, or naming and indication, to embodiment and *performance*." Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (1977), quoted in Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology, and the Body*, 2. This formulation is particularly apt for the interwar period, in which dance became the medium of the "expressive" modern body.

enactments of modernism's evolving, and conflicting, social and technological ideals.

This article explores the role played by photo-illustrated magazines in the projection of this modern physicality, through a case study of the market-leading Ullstein monthly, *UHU*, in the years 1925–30.³ In the period of relative economic stability and modernist optimism before the Depression crisis, the magazine's diverse photography sought to bring together, and symbolically reconcile, the opposed ideologies and ideals of Weimar body culture. In *UHU*'s photo-pages, erotic figure studies, declaring the new permissive culture of modernity, appear alongside naked athletes whose sunlit postures assert the de-eroticization of the body; natural worlds provide the setting both for peaceful Edenic rituals and quasi-militarized physical training. The symbolism of these images is not reducible to a single, unified world view; rather, they represent the magazine's ideal of a tolerant, reconciled modernity, united in its quest for new forms of social order and for the expression of modern subjectivity.

The particular focus of the article is on the symbolism of group images. In brief, I argue that the self-conscious configurations in *UHU*'s idealist photographs related, symbolically, to the idea of mass society, with its equivocal potential for social harmony or fragmentation and disorder. As Colin Counsell argues of the Weimar mass display phenomenon, the variety of these human configurations expressed both the era's ideological divisions and its profound yearning for consensus: "in the absence of any agreed conception of the social whole, symbologies of the mass became inherently speculative, each image functioning as an implicit argument for one or other model of human communality."⁴ The present article broadens the scope of Counsell's hypothesis to include the full range of *UHU*'s dance and body culture

³ I have opted to capitalize the magazine's title, as this is how the name appeared on the front cover. Other authors, cited below, opt for *Uhu*; the usage "Der Uhu" (The Eagle Owl) appears in the magazine's own editorials.

⁴ Counsell, "Dancing to Utopia," 156.

images: my assumption is that, in a contemporary visual culture built around the symbolic use of repetition and regularity, *all* figure groupings would have inflected these same resonances, with greater or less intensity. Playing on the visual similarities and spatial relations between figures, the magazine's human patterns crystallized the contrasting ideals that underlay the Weimar "passion for association."⁵ From the companionable gatherings of outdoor leisure pursuits to the martial rituals of men's rhythmic gymnastics, *UHU*'s youthful actors constructed multiple visions of the social gestalt – a proliferation which contained, in itself, the dream of an inclusive, reconciled community.

The Present Body

In the broadest symbolic terms, *UHU*'s body culture images describe a continuity between the visual surface of the living body – Graeser's "radiant bronze skin" – and its mass visibility via technological media. As Susan Sontag observes, photography's potency derives from a mythic sense of the image as imprint of the physical world, such that the referent and its visual representation become symbolically merged: "Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it."⁶ In *UHU*'s photography, this sense of the figure's physical actuality combines with its temporal immediacy: youthful dancers, athletes and sunbathers inhabit the continuous, unfolding present of an ideal, universalized modernity. The elements in this illusion of presence can be broadly enumerated. Firstly, the photographed figures are performative, in that their situations and postures are overtly responsive to the camera's gaze. Such 'performances' include the highly structured displays of dance troupes and mass gymnastics, but also informal groupings of swimsuit-clad beach parties or weekend camping trips, in which the subjects' ease before the camera is part of the scene's idealized modernity; the solitary female nudes in studio and outdoor photographs express this same

⁵ The phrase is from David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History*, 1984, quoted in Counsell, "Dancing to Utopia," 158.

⁶ Sontag, "In Plato's Cave," 281.

awareness, either looking into the camera or appearing elegantly posed. Secondly, the photographed bodies are youthful – young, beautiful women; men with sculpted, gymnastic physiques – reflecting conventional ideals of physical beauty, but also projecting the unclothed youthful body as symbolic of renewal, and of the future’s unbounded, dynamic possibilities.⁷ Finally, the universalized presence of these emancipated bodies reflects their variety and prominence within the magazine: images depict both male and female figures, in both rural and urban settings, engaged in vigorous activity (sport and dance) or captured in repose – the “sleeping beauty”, for example, is a recurrent compositional motif.

UHU’s body images formed part of the magazine’s superabundant visual culture, built on continuous variety in pictorial themes and the poetic interplay of disparate images.⁸ Within this photographic profusion, the unclothed body functioned both as resonant symbol and as synecdoche of modernity, appearing, with no apparent incongruity, alongside the many other, contrasting projections of a perfected, reconciled world that graced the magazine’s monthly issues.⁹ Karl Toepfer notes a similar heterogeneity in *Der Querschnitt* (*UHU*’s high-brow literary stable mate),¹⁰ describing this dynamic picture show as a signifier of the new mass modernity, to which the photographic nude self-evidently belonged:

images of nude women dancers ... appeared side by side with pictures of sports, theatre, film, and society personalities, modernist paintings of nudes, stills from theatrical and film productions, photos of people from exotic or primitive cultures, scenes of modern urban life ... Readers apparently appreciated the idea that both nudity and dance operated within a constantly recombinable constellation or montage of modern images ...¹¹

⁷ For the resurgence of classicist ideals in interwar body culture, see Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body*, 2–10.

⁸ Facsimiles of the complete run of *UHU* can be viewed online at magazine.illustrierte-presse.de/en/the-magazines (accessed June 19, 2018)

⁹ For Oliver Lugin, it is this potential to capture and mediate “all the objects in the world” that defines the fleeting promise of Weimar-era photography. The inverse consequence of this totalizing project, producing “photo-inflation” and a kind of cultural fatigue, would become increasingly clear to some commentators by the end of the 1920s. Lugin, “‘Photo-Inflation’,” 221–25.

¹⁰ See also Cowan, “Cutting through the Archive,” 16–21.

¹¹ Toepfer, “Nudity and Modernity,” 87. See also, Magilow, *The Photography of Crisis*, 39–47.

As Toepfer suggests, the modernity of the unclothed, liberated body in magazine photographs was not subject to its context or particular posture: the display of full or partial nudity was *in itself* a declaration of modern values.

In an *UHU* photo-page from December 1927, a naked young woman leaps into the air with her arms stretched wide to embrace the midday sunlight (fig. 1). The background is reduced and largely neutral – a patch of sand, monochrome strips of sea, coast, and sky – producing an emphatic focus on the woman’s body, in its performance and projection of ideal modernity. This generalized symbolic intention is reinforced in the caption: “Selbstverständliche Nacktheit: Der unbedeckte Körper auf den Sportsplätzen ist heute schon zu einer Selbstverständlichkeit geworden” (Nudity as a matter of course: The unclothed body on sports grounds has become quite normal these days).¹² This claim of *normalization*, serving both to justify the inclusion of nude images and to affirm the photographic nude as symbolic of modernity, is taken to its limit in a photo-spread from September 1928 (fig. 2). The photographs show two female nudes, in back and frontal view, representing “Zwei Berufe” (Two occupations): that of artist’s model and dancer. The figures’ insouciant air of absorption in the moment – the model confers with her male artist; the dancer, Claire Bauroff, has her eyes closed in artistic rapture – goes beyond the self-conscious, proclamatory mode of “Selbstverständliche Nacktheit”: going naked, these pictures imply, is *just what one does* in modern life. The two images of the female body here describe a remarkable distillation of the elements of *UHU*’s modern ideal: the aestheticization of ‘ordinary’ life, and its technological mass-mediation; the reconciliation of this technology with the organic body, with artistic traditions and with the expression of subjectivity; a questioning of traditional proprieties and gender roles. *UHU*’s unveiled youthful figures, projected as the

¹² Photo-caption from “Das Nackte und wir” (The nude and us), *UHU*, J4, H3, Dec 1927, 62. The free translation, here, is an idiomatic equivalent of the German text.

embodiment of modernism's ideal values, are also the actors in a theatre of utopian possibilities.

Performing Patterns

A topical photo-story from October 1928 – the height of the magazine's optimistic middle period – depicts a synchronized dance troupe “on holiday” in the countryside.¹³ The photographs, by Sasha Stone, construct a light-hearted fantasy, with the Jackson Girls, a quintessential product of metropolitan modernity, as temporary residents of a traditional farm, replete with horses, hayricks and wooden carts. The story's humorous intent is conveyed, in part, through the incongruity of the structural (i.e. compositional, non-decorative) patterns, which underline the dancers' modern identity and the cheerful absurdity of their pastoral setting – Stone, here, relies on the reader's cultural competence regarding the symbolic intention of different pattern forms. In the central double-page photo, the Girls are engaged in a series of rustic farmyard tasks (fig. 3): one pair draws water with a hand pump, others turn hay, ride a horse, tend piglets, and so forth. The individuated poses parody the picturesque conventions of genre painting, but, more particularly, the standardized modernity symbolized by kick-line dance: the Jackson Girls dress identically, even on holiday! The resulting playful tension in the image, moving between individuation and communality, is contained in the patterning: the loose informal arrays formed of the dispersed figures are strengthened by their striking *similarity*, favouring perceptual grouping (note, for example, the three heads forming a rising curve from the lower-right corner). The Girls' natural state of geometric order is duly restored on the following page spread, in the serial replications of the dinner table (identical place settings, identical women in uniform posture) (fig. 4); on the facing page, the Girls fully reclaim their machine-age identity – even, adventitiously, forming a near perfect triangle with their exercising bodies.

¹³ “Als die Jackson-Girls auf Urlaub waren,” (When the Jackson Girls were on holiday), *UHU*, J5, H1, Oct 1928, 34–39.

“Als die Jackson-Girls auf Urlaub waren”, in its frivolous way, describes a key element in the utopian symbolism of synchronized dance. Moving from the subjective, individuated mode to the mass configuration – and, implicitly, back again – the dancers enact an ideal social contract: the individual, as the performer/operator of a bountiful, rationalized modernity, retains agency, and can thus negotiate a space for subjectivity within the technocratic structure. In *UHU*’s features and photo-pages it is this ‘backstage’ view, both literal and figurative, that predominates: a typical photo-page, from March 1928, shows the Tiller Girls in a rehearsal break,¹⁴ chatting, reading, physically affectionate, while their legs and bodies construct informal, *distributive* structural patterns.¹⁵ This implicit guarantee of subjectivity, projected in the broader photographic imagery of the synchronized dance troupes, has been downplayed in the critical historiography, which takes Siegfried Kracauer’s Weimar essays “The Mass Ornament” (1927) and “Girls and Crisis” (1931) as its founding texts.¹⁶ For Kracauer, synchronized dance symbolizes the dissolution of subjectivity within technological modernity, a process to which the intended audience – defined as the “broadest mass of people” – willingly accedes:

These products of American distraction are no longer individual girls, but indissoluble girl clusters whose movements are demonstrations of mathematics. ... it is only as a tiny piece of the mass that the individual can clamber up charts and can service machines without any friction. ... The mass ornament is the aesthetic reflection of the rationality to which the prevailing economic system aspires.¹⁷

In Kracauer’s reading, the Tiller Girls’ mass audience is “trained” and “moulded” by the performance to embrace its role as functionaries in the capitalist machine – “The

¹⁴ “Probenpause bei den Tiller-Girls” (Rehearsal break for the Tiller Girls), photo-page, *UHU*, J4, H6, Mar 1928, 83. See, also: “Die schwere Kunst, leicht zu scheinen: Revue von der Kehrseite” (Making the hardest art form look easy: Revue seen from behind), *UHU*, J5, H2, Nov 1928, 69–75. The Tiller Girls appear in a conventional kick-line pose in the July 1930 issue (*UHU*, J6, H10, Jul 1930, 14–15), reprising the ‘holiday’ fantasy from “Als die Jackson-Girls auf Urlaub waren”; on this occasion, the Tiller Girls appear in (unmatched!) swimsuits in lapping waves on a shoreline.

¹⁵ The term *distributive pattern* is proposed, in this article, as categorical, referring to all forms of irregular, non-geometric grouping. *Geometric* patterns form the other fundamental category in this proposed basic morphology.

¹⁶ The rediscovery of Kracauer’s early critical writings by the 1960s ‘disciples’ of the Frankfurt School is described in Witte, Correll, and Zipes, “Introduction to Siegfried Kracauer’s ‘The Mass Ornament,’” 59–60.

¹⁷ Kracauer, “The Mass Ornament,” 75–79.

hands in the factory correspond to the legs of the Tiller Girls” – though what this audience is offered *in return* is far from clear.¹⁸ “The Mass Ornament”, for all its canonical status, presents a curiously lopsided argument, in which the *erotics* of synchronized dance, its promise of utopian order and abundance, are discounted. Similarly, in Günter Berghaus’s landmark essay “Girllkultur”, the experience of the Tiller Girls’ audience becomes less a fantasy of *consumerism* (the audience as desiring subject) than of *objectification* (the audience as commodity): “the ornamental structures underlying these revues transform the everyday experience of depersonalization, drill and routine into aesthetic pleasure.”¹⁹

An insightful critique of this Kracauerian spectator is offered by Patrice Petro, in her 1989 book *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany*. For Petro, the figure is a projection of the negative characteristics Kracauer associates with femininity – passivity, uniformity, and uncritical consumption – onto the newly visible, and hence dangerously empowered, female spectator; the notion of audiences passively colluding in their own repression speaks, suggests Petro, more to the anti-feminist agenda of Weimar intellectuals than to the symbolism of synchronized dance.²⁰ Notably, for other, less high-minded contemporary reviewers the symbolic vision created by the dance troupes was not of rationalization *per se* – what Kracauer calls the “virtues of the conveyor belt”²¹ – but of the consumer plenty that this technological modernity promised to deliver. A commentary on the Tiller Girls 1928 revue, by the journalist Adam Kuckhoff, conveys the show’s mass appeal: “This sensual journey ... never leads to a land of bad taste, but into a realm where everything is miraculous and fascinating. ... Surprising scenic tricks, fantastically

¹⁸ Kracauer, “The Mass Ornament,” 77, 79.

¹⁹ Berghaus, “Girllkultur,” 213. Colin Counsell argues that the synchronized dancers were symbolic objects, but that they represented erotic commodities rather than factory workers: “their interchangeability suggest[ed] their commodification, while their pliability *en masse* functioned as a metaphor for sexual compliance.” Counsell, “Dancing to Utopia,” 156. As Kate Elswit notes, however, contemporary accounts by male writers describe a paradoxical *desexualization* of the revue dancers. Elswit, “Accessing Unison,” 56–57.

²⁰ Petro, *Joyless Streets*, 65–70.

²¹ Siegfried Kracauer, “Girls and Crisis”, 1931, quoted in Berghaus, “Girllkultur,” 212.

beautiful costumes, extreme precision of choreography ... the whole is a feast for the eye."²²

Kuckhoff's sensory language, describing an erotics of consumerism – the spectacle, as consumable "feast", is available only to purchasers – points to the crucial subjectivity missing from Kracauer's equation.²³ The transaction between audience and synchronized dancers was, however, more than a simple economic exchange. As the human pattern is performative, it operates symbolically both as subject and object, creator and construct; the viewer's response to this double symbol involves – in varying degrees – both *identification* with the human figure, and *objectification* through the mastering gaze. Photographs of female dance troupes in *UHU* magazine projected an abstract symbolism of technocratic order, containing the mythic promise of a dynamic and prosperous consumer society;²⁴ the geometric human pattern both embodied this technocratic ideal as the figure of social order, and affirmed the performer/viewer's symbolic possession of the utopian future.²⁵

The idea of modernity as reaching toward a utopian social order plays out recurrently in *UHU*'s photo-illustrated features of the late 1920s. The mythic ideal is visually projected in photographic sequences, in which human patterns symbolize the alternate modes of modern social living. The story "Wochen-Ende: der wöchentliche Sommer-Urlaub" (Weekend: the weekly summer holiday), from September 1926, celebrating the new possibilities of motorized, 'Americanized', leisure, composes a typical visual narrative.²⁶ On the opening page spread, a young

²² Quoted in Berghaus, "Girlkultur," 213.

²³ For the construction of the new woman as consumer, see Kosta, "Cigarettes, Advertising, and the Weimar Republic's Modern Woman," 134–51.

²⁴ See, for example: "Ein Step der Alfred-Jackson Girls" (One step of the Alfred Jackson Girls), photo-page, *UHU*, J5, H4, Jan 1929, 8.

²⁵ Nancy Nenno describes the Tiller Girls' performances as "a screen on which fears regarding modernization and modernity could be projected and subsequently fetishized into a pleasurable experience". Nenno, "Femininity, the Primitive, and Modern Urban Space," 149. Nenno's "screen" offers an apt metaphor for the abstracted, cosmic symbolism of the human pattern, and its subjective completion by the viewer.

²⁶ Nolan, *Visions of Modernity*, 108–10. For the ideal of the leisured weekend in Weimar-era magazines, see Schwarz, "Die Erfindung des Wochendes," 275–304.

woman in gymnastic costume performs a high kick in the surf; on the facing page, the elements of the rural “weekend” are assembled: an automobile, a tent, a relaxed group of fashionable young people. The commodity culture on which this modern ideal depends is illustrated in further images, including a double-page photo of campers by a lake, with the caption: “What one can bring for the weekend on a motorbike with sidecar: tent, collapsible table, tableware, folding canoe and two pretty female companions.”²⁷ However, whilst the consumer items in these photographs – principally, the vehicles – represent the enabling technology of expansive modern leisure, they are not, in themselves, fetishized: the true objects of desire are the enfolding natural landscape and the exuberant companionship of its youthful occupants. This mythic narrative is spectacularly projected in four photographs on the final page spread (fig. 5) – an embracing couple at a lake’s edge turn to smile for the camera; a loaded car departs on its journey home; a mixed group in bathing suits construct geometric human patterns – thus cheerfully aligning themselves with the symbolism of the rationalized social order. Moving effortlessly from the informal (distributive) mode to the formal (geometric), *UHU*’s young moderns – here, including an obligatory film actor – ‘perform’ the technological modernity that defines their identity and their shared values. The modern individual, these pictures imply, is at home both in the natural world and machine-age society, and expresses both communality and an easy, companionable subjectivity. The gender identities and relations of this innocent photographic idyll are presented as relaxed and de-eroticized: males and females occupy equal positions within the modern, non-hierarchical human pattern.

The modernity of “Wochen-Ende” represents an important strand in *UHU*’s photographic idealism, in which the emancipatory and harmonizing potential of technological society, associated with the image of America, is combined with the

²⁷ “Was man auf einem Motorrad mit Beiwagen zum Wochenende mitnehmen kann: Liegezelt, Klappische, Ehgeschirr, Faltboot, und zwei hübsche Begleiterinnen,” photo caption from “Wochen-Ende: der wöchentliche Sommer-Urlaub” (Weekend: the weekly summer holiday), *UHU*, J2, H12, Sept 1926, 4–5.

Germanic ideal of the *return to nature*, a cultural myth of central importance to prewar Expressionism, and with deep roots in the German Romantic tradition.²⁸ Stories such as “5 Mädchen und ein Zelt” (Five girls and a tent), from May 1927,²⁹ and “Das Amazonenboot” (The Amazon Boat), from September 1927, closely follow the “Wochen-Ende” template, with group images of attractive young women engaged in co-operative physical pursuits or exercises in the open air.³⁰ As in the earlier story, the human patterning moves freely from the distributive to the geometric, as though these perfect youths are ready at all moments to perform the symbolic postures and configurations of the modern ideal – the final picture caption of “Das Amazonenboot” notes: “Die erste Sorge nach der Mahlzeit: Schlank bleiben” (The first concern after mealtime: staying slim.)³¹ The quip nicely captures the contemporary character of these stories, and defines the parameters of their symbolic vision of modernity. Though the human figures appear in natural settings, their primary visual and symbolic relationship is to *each other* – a gestalt unity strengthened, as in “Als die Jackson-Girls auf Urlaub waren”, by similarities of physique and clothing. Nature here provides a sunlit stage for the display of modern capacities – sociability, leisured mobility, physical culture – but remains instrumental, rather than intrinsic, to symbolic identity: these young people carry modernity with them, and return with it to the city.

A photo-page from August 1926, the month before the “Wochen-Ende” issue, plays on this modish embrace of the natural, to comic effect. The page, titled “Blühende Wiesen im August” (Blooming meadows in August), shows photographs of bare

²⁸ For the *return to nature* as symbolic idea and artistic practice in early twentieth-century German modernism, see Benson, “Fantasy and Functionality,” 14–18, and Boyd White, “The Expressionist Sublime,” 118–36. Also, Lloyd, *German Expressionism*, 102–29.

²⁹ “5 Mädchen und ein Zelt” (Five girls and a tent), *UHU*, J3, H8, May 1927, 5–11.

³⁰ The subject of young people camping and exploring nature, in the *Wandervogel* tradition, first appears in the second issue of *UHU*. “Das neue Geschlecht: Jugend in Amerika” (The new generation: Youth in America), *UHU*, (J1), H2, Nov 1924, 2–8, with text by Fritz Zielesch, describes wholesome young people (“Erotic? Not a trace!”) escaping the “sea of skyscrapers” into the open air. The informal group images set the trend for the later stories.

³¹ “Das Amazonenboot” (The Amazon boat), *UHU*, J3, H12, Sept 1927, 52–53.

legs pointing surreally skyward in the middle of a grassy field, as if their owners have plunged head first into the earth; the lower image reveals the backs and bent arms of a group of young women, in matching gymslips, performing shoulder stands.³² That these “flowers” are not native to this soil is, of course, evident from their modern attire and uniform posture; the pictures are, moreover, a near perfect duplicate of a posed image from the previous issue, July 1926, in which identical young women with their legs in the air advertise “Gymnastics for ladies (‘Young and beautiful’, Part 2): the latest Ullstein special issue”.³³ The pairing points to a tension, and recurrent anxiety, at the heart of *UHU*’s modernist vision: that in attempting to reconcile *Technik* and *Kultur* – machine-age values with an organicist, communitarian idealism – *Kultur* becomes hollowed out; the natural world to which the modern individual returns becomes a mere accessory in the cult of youth and beauty. This anxiety finds its clearest expression in other strands of *UHU*’s body culture photography, in which images of the naked, naturalised human body, and its patterned configurations, project symbolic alternatives to the rationalist, consumerist values of the technological era.

The Erotic Body

The history of *UHU*’s nude photography, described simply in terms of its variable prominence within the magazine’s visual culture, correlates strikingly with developments in the Weimar economy and the associated national mood. The male nude, represented by topless film stars and hard-bodied athletes, made a first appearance in the July 1925 issue, in a feature on open-air gymnastics;³⁴ occasional images of topless, or fully naked, women began to appear from May 1926.³⁵ Nude

³² “Blühende Wiesen im August” (Blooming meadows in August), photo-page, *UHU*, J2, H11, Aug 1926, 82.

³³ Ullstein advertisement, “Gymnastik für Damen (‘Jung und schön’ zweite Teil), Das neueste Ullstein-Sonderheft. Überall für M. 1.25)”, *UHU*, J2, H10, Jul 1926, 131.

³⁴ “Vom Umgang mit der Sonne” (In contact with the sun), *UHU*, (J1), H10, Jul 1925, 7–9. The ‘militarized’ male nude is discussed below.

³⁵ *UHU*’s first photograph of the female nude, featuring the dancer Claire Bauroff, appeared in “Was sie tanzen” (“What they are dancing”), *UHU*, J2, H8, May 1926, 47.

photography's significant, though always sporadic, presence in *UHU* dated from the end of the following year, with the great majority of images appearing in the issues of November 1927 to May 1930.³⁶ The nude's rapid disappearance from the magazine – a valedictory female nude appears in the August 1930 issue³⁷ – coincided with the collapse of the German economy and the onset of the Depression.

That *UHU*'s cult of the nude was responsive to broader contemporary currents in Weimar society is axiomatic to the visual readings in this article.³⁸ Whilst nude photographs projected diverse symbolic and aesthetic ideals, their common element was a degree of opposition to the normative values of technological modernity. The performance of nudity, as captured in *UHU*'s photography, described a radically different stance *vis à vis* the machine age to that projected by girls in swimsuits – images which symbolized the domestication of the body, and of nature itself, within a rationalized social order. Nudity, by contrast, as the expression of an irreducible and universal corporeality, proclaimed the organic body as the absolute ground of value and identity; as the element within modern experience that could *not* be relativized, or moulded to fit the regimental imperatives of technocratic society.³⁹ To this capacity for resistance, the Weimar era added an unbounded sense of *possibility*, an implicit belief that the provisional social structures and values of this new modernity could be shaped by modern individuals. *UHU*'s nude photography, depicting a diversity of figures in contrasting postures and settings, related to a

³⁶ For a discursive account of nude photography in Weimar-era photo-illustrated magazines, see Rössler, "Schönheit, Natur, Lebensfreude!" 5–17.

³⁷ "Der Schwan" (The swan), photo-page, *UHU*, J6, H11, Aug 1930, 68.

³⁸ Karl Toepfer notes that nudity in commercial ballet peaked around 1927, after which Berlin audiences, apparently, grew "weary of the lack of innovation or daring in nude performance". In avant-garde "expressive" dance, similarly, nudity had a diminished presence by 1930, though "*Nacktkultur* in general continued to grow in popularity": Toepfer, "Nudity and Modernity," 94. The movement away from spectacular nudity thus appears to have predated the Depression, as part of the broader evolution of Weimar culture. The economic crisis may have confirmed a development that was already in process.

³⁹ David Harvey, following Foucault, argues that the "irreducibility" of the body makes it the only "site of power" from which resistance to the "faceless, rational, and technocratic" modern state can be mobilized "in the struggle to liberate human desire". Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 213. As this article describes, the body's "power" in the Weimar period extended beyond this erotic potential, through its symbolic association with ideas of militaristic national renewal, and the organic utopia.

spectrum of competing ideologies, promoting erotic expressivity, the return to nature, or muscular self-improvement, as key to the ideal society. The economic crisis that engulfed Germany after the Wall Street Crash would make all such idealisms redundant – or, at least, the liberal bourgeois, communitarian varieties promoted in *UHU*. The disappearance of the magazine's nudes marked, symbolically, the death of Weimar optimism.

UHU's images of the female nude, which include pastoral compositions, close-up figure studies, and photographs of nude dancers, contributed a mild eroticism to the editorial mix, and were, clearly, part of the magazine's popular appeal.⁴⁰ How significant this erotic element was to *UHU*'s commercial success is less certain: the nude was one among many pictorial themes, absent from most issues of the magazine's 10-year run, and, except for the summer 1928 issues, limited to single photo-pages and occasional feature articles.⁴¹ *UHU*'s nude photography presented, moreover, a more diverse mix than would have served simply for mass-market titillation; erotic appeal was only one facet of its complex, and contradictory, projections of the female body. As with all body culture images, the nude figure presented both as subject and idealized object: the occupant of varieties of aesthetic and erotic idyll, but also symbolic of the emancipation of modern subjectivity. The

⁴⁰ An anecdote by Eva Noack-Mosse describes *UHU*'s editor Kurt Szafranski demanding of his staff, "Habt Ihr nicht noch ein paar freundliche Fotos?" (Don't you have a few more friendly photos?), which translated to a call for added "sex appeal". Noack-Mosse, "Uhu," 187–88. Whether *UHU*'s reputation for nudity differed substantially from that of rival titles, such as *Das Magazin*, is difficult to judge, on current evidence; the new photo-illustrated magazines were collectively described, by hostile critics such as Edlef Köppen and Leo Lania, as the symptoms of a frivolous and sexualized "American" culture. Kaes, Jay, and Dimendberg, *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 644; Glaeser and Mörchen, *Fazit*, 242.

⁴¹ The few historiographical references to *UHU* have over-emphasized the magazine's nude photography. Peter Gay offers a brief and rather dismissive pen portrait, which perhaps captures something of *UHU*'s contemporary reputation, though it does little justice to the magazine's varied content: "For middle-brow tastes, mixing well-tailored essays, frivolous short stories, racy reportage, and photographs of naked girls, there was the pocket-sized monthly *Uhu*." Gay, *Weimar Culture*, 184. Erika Esau's account of *UHU*, in her 2013 essay on *Der Querschnitt*, only partially corrects this impression of insubstantiality: "Sporting a jaunty illustrated cover in colour, and filled with photographs of film stars, scantily clad women, and well-known celebrities of the literary world, *Uhu* also included jokes, vignettes, and amusing articles about art and theatre. Although primarily seen as an entertainment magazine, its contributors included over its ten-year run Vicki Baum, Walter Benjamin, Johannes Itten, and even Albert Einstein." Esau, "'The Magazine of Enduring Value,'" 884. For its photography alone, *UHU* merits a more substantial and significant place in Weimar cultural history than these accounts suggest.

ideal reconciliation this implies, between the liberated, expressive body and the rationalist modernity which must accommodate this expressivity, is projected in images such as the “Zwei Berufe” (fig. 2), discussed above. The problematic nature of such a reconciliation can be glimpsed in the rare nude *group* images that appeared in *UHU*, and inferred, negatively, from the general absence of such compositions from the magazine’s photographic culture.

In Karl Toepfer’s account of Weimar *Nackttanz* (nude dance), the unclothed body functions as a “double sign”: “on the one hand, it presents nudity as a return to an eternal primeval, and on the other hand, it regards modern identity as an unprecedented condition of nakedness.”⁴² This paradox, and the tensions it creates, are intrinsic to *UHU*’s photography of the female nude, in which the figure represents both the “eternal primeval” erotic/organic body and the rational, socialized body of machine-age modernity. In one formulation, exemplified by a portrait of the dancer Etelka Marquita from December 1927 (fig. 6), overt eroticism is declared as a property of modern subjectivity: the dancer, embodying the sophisticated, sexually liberated *new woman*, meets the camera’s gaze; the ostensibly arbitrary placement of the portrait alongside the image of a bulldog – caption: “Ein Prachtexemplar” (A fine specimen) – underlines the fashionable urbanity of *UHU*’s visual culture. Modernity here incorporates the erotic through a spectacular, but carefully calibrated, permissiveness; photo-pages in later issues push the boundaries further, into voyeuristic fantasy,⁴³ and full-frontal nudity (fig. 7); pubic hair is displayed for the first and only time in a figure study from February 1930.⁴⁴

The ideal synthesis of *ratio* and *eros* embodied in these nude figures is staged in the literal, and symbolic, light of day; as Wolfgang Graeser declares, the modern body “stands anew in unconcealed clarity”, liberated from the corsets in Atget’s window

⁴² Toepfer, “Nudity and Modernity,” 67. For the liberal, permissive strand in Weimar *Nacktkultur*, see Frecot, “*Die Schönheit*,” 37–46.

⁴³ See, for example, “Schatten der Jalousie” (Shadows of the blinds), photo-page, *UHU*, J5, H9, Jun 1929, 44.

⁴⁴ “Die Sitzende” (Seated female figure), photo-page, *UHU*, J6, H5, Feb 1930, 40.

display and from repressive nineteenth-century morality.⁴⁵ This symbolic reconciliation is problematic, however, due to the unruly nature of desire, which continually threatens to subvert the moral consensus on which social order depends – a transgressive potential played out in *UHU*'s increasingly permissive photographic content. Crucially, to sustain the female nude as an emblem of modern subjectivity, she must also be configured as a socialized, communitarian figure; such human patterns are, however, notably absent from the magazine's feminine idylls. Two key exceptions, published at the peak of *UHU*'s nude photography period, illustrate the tensions in this modernist synthesis.⁴⁶ In "Tänzerinnen unter sich" ([Female] Dancers amongst themselves), from January 1929, young women relax or exercise in the changing room of a dance studio; in each of the two informal group photos, one of the dancers is shown naked, in back view.⁴⁷ The images project nudity as an assimilated element of metropolitan modernity, but only by carefully policing the scene's erotic potential: the naked dancer has her back to the camera and to her clothed companions, whose eyes also are turned elsewhere; *UHU*'s archetypal figure of erotic modernity must, it appears, curtail her "eternal primeval" energy before she can enter the social arena.

A very different form of containment appears in the article "Kampf gegen die steifen Knochen: Von der Geometrie unseres Körpers" (Battle against stiff joints: With the geometry of our bodies), from August 1928, featuring one extraordinary, and uniquely experimental, double-page photograph (fig. 8). The image shows three identical nude female figures practising a synchronized gymnastic posture on a sunlit grassy slope. The regular geometric human pattern, with its clear reference to

⁴⁵ Corsets had a particular significance for German theorists of body culture. For the architect and life reformer Paul Schultze-Naumburg, writing in 1905, the distorted body shape produced by the corset was a direct cause of degeneracy in intellectual life: "One has to look at the type of those unfortunates, whose crumpled, disjointed, odd, twisted, swollen ... prematurely deteriorated bodies scarcely remind one of a human body in its outer appearance, in order to understand how crumpled, disjointed, odd, twisted, and swollen ... the thoughts produced by such bodies must be." Quoted in Hau, *The Cult of Health and Beauty*, 39.

⁴⁶ See also the images of *Freilichttanz* (open-air dance) in Artur Michel's article "Was sie tanzen" (What they are dancing), *UHU*, J2, H8, May 1926, 48.

⁴⁷ "Tänzerinnen unter sich" ([Female] Dancers amongst themselves), *UHU*, J5, H4, Jan 1929, 54, 56.

contemporary kick-line dance, presents an unambiguous affirmation of machine modernity – a symbolism reinforced in the accompanying article, on Rudolf von Laban’s theories of the mathematical body: “Laban ... finds connections everywhere between the laws of vibration, the forms of crystals, and human structure and movement.”⁴⁸ In the photograph, this mechanistic vision of the body, and of technocratic social order, is forcefully combined with the elements of an organic utopia: dancing female nudes, sunlight, trees. The result is a bizarre clash of iconographies, in which the potency of the erotic idyll is contained by the denaturalized human pattern: a repressive rather than synthetic transformation. The female nude inhabits the modern, social body only at the cost of her subjectivity and her organic being.⁴⁹

The fragility of the female nude as a communitarian symbol – there were no further female nude group images in *UHU* after January 1929 – reflects the general movement in Weimar culture toward the masculinized, machine-modernist ascendancy of the late 1920s. In negative terms, this dominance equates to the gradual eclipse, within *UHU*’s visual culture, of what might be termed *organic modernism*, describing the dream of a holistic, organic modernity governed by principles of community, and of aesthetic and spiritual beauty. *UHU*’s bucolic female nudes relate, in particular, to the idealistic visions of the *Lebensreformbewegung* (life reform movement), in which varieties of physical and lifestyle discipline embodied the values and social relations of the ideal society.⁵⁰ Whilst the movement’s conflicting *völkisch* and progressive ideologies fall beyond

⁴⁸ “Laban ... findet überall Zusammenhänge zwischen den mathematischen Schwingungsgesetzen, den Formen der Kristalle und dem Aufbau und der Bewegung des Menschen” in “Kampf gegen die steifen Knochen” (Battle against stiff joints), *UHU*, J4, H11, Aug 1928, 24–29. The photographs in the article were reproduced from Paul Isenfels, *Getanzte Harmonien (Danced Harmonies)* (1927), featuring performers from Ida Herion’s school of modern dance in Stuttgart. For a discussion of these photographs in the context of Weimar *Nackttanz*, see Toepfer, *Empire of Ecstasy*, 67.

⁴⁹ The gymnastic pose in figure 8 was quoted in the cover illustration of *UHU*, J6, H10, July 1930. The change from a nude to a clothed female figure nicely illustrates the more restrained attitude to female nudity at the turn of the decade.

⁵⁰ Rohkrämer, *Eine andere Moderne?*, 117–61; Hau, *The Cult of Health and Beauty*, 14–50; Ash, “Gestalt Psychology in Weimar Culture,” 395–415.

the scope of this article, it is important to note the mutual emphasis on *community* within its mythic constructs, and the crystallizations of this ideal in projections of a sunlit nudist utopia.⁵¹ In *UHU's Nacktkultur* summer of 1928, this utopia was enacted not by adult female nudes – the perennial figure of erotic fantasy – but by her surrogate: the prelapsarian, peaceable figure of the naked child.

The six-page photo-story “Maien-Sonne am Strand” (May sunlight on the beach), from May 1928, inhabits the common ground of the life reformers’ natural Eden, located, consensually, in a pristine premodernity: the article’s subtitle imagines the photographer as a stealthy hunter, bringing home “Photographische Beute von einsamen Strandwegen” (Photographic prey from lonely beach paths).⁵² The children’s nudity is a conventional signifier of innocence, so the figures can express their innate sociability without erotic transgression, and without the normative, denaturalizing constraints of the regular geometric human pattern. Published at the same period as *UHU's* competing, irreconcilable visions of modern nudity, the story thus both reaches towards a universal symbolism and declares its impossibility: organic social relations within technological modernity are the province of childhood only. The idealism of “Maien-Sonne am Strand” is, however, more than a mere elegy for lost innocence. Unlike the machine-like dancers of “Kampf gegen die steifen Knochen”, and the pleasure-seeking moderns of “Wochen-Ende”, the child nudists are *at home* in the natural world, and thus embody the authentic Goethean gestalt; liberated from the ‘clothing’ of modern civilization, the children enact the harmonious order of organic life, expressed both in human patterns and in the relationship of individual figures to their environment. Marking the short-lived high point of *UHU's* organic modernism, the compositional values are, ironically, those of prewar pictorialist photography, with *natural distributive* social patterns constructing

⁵¹ A typical account of the period describes a prelapsarian Eden in which: “a naked *Volk* frolicked on every river, at every lake, on every ocean’s beach, when naked youth stepped onto athletic fields for competition, and when the sun glowed, one could lay with languor in green fields or warm hammocks.” Charly Sträßer, “Der neue Kurs” (1931), quoted in Ross, *Naked Germany*, 16.

⁵² Subtitle of the article “Maien-Sonne am Strand,” *UHU*, J4, H8, May 1928, 34.

a 'timeless' symbolic idyll: the three naked boys on the opening page spread are perfectly identical, yet their postures are relaxed and individuated; ideal communality contains, and fosters, the expression of a liberated subjectivity. Two pages later, the natural origins of this spiritualized humanity are expressed, likewise, through symbolic patterning (fig. 9): the nymph-like figure of a young girl is configured within an organic array of birch trees, whose slanting verticals echo the curves of her tapering body. The self-replicating order found in the natural geometry of plant forms – as celebrated in Karl Blossfeldt's *Urformen der Kunst* (English title: *Art Forms in Nature*), of 1928 – is also inscribed in the human figure, and in the organic society which technological man has left behind.

The Militarized Body

Paralleling its photography of the female nude, over the same historical period, *UHU* published a number of features built around the spectacle of male nude gymnastics. Whilst there were a small number of half-length topless portraits of men, which project a feminized image of male beauty,⁵³ *UHU*'s group photography of the male nude was exclusively confined to the gymnastic arena. The constraints within this theme go, in fact, even further: photographs in four stories from the years 1925–29 contain highly similar content and employ an identical visual grammar: a template established in the first of these articles, "Vom Umgang mit der Sonne" (In contact with the sun), of July 1925 (fig. 10). The group photograph captures four near identical, oiled and muscular naked men, in a natural setting (here, a lakeside), performing a synchronized exercise with dumbbells; sharply defined shadows indicate a bright midday sun. The formula is repeated, to the letter, in "Überschätzung der Nacktheit?" (Overestimation of nudity?) from June 1928, showing nude athletes with cabers, clubs and medicine balls, in spectacular geometric patterns.⁵⁴ Curiously, in neither of the accompanying articles is reference

⁵³ See, for example: "Der Jüngling" (The youth), photo-page, *UHU*, J4, H10, Jul 1928, 76.

⁵⁴ "Überschätzung der Nacktheit?" (Overestimation of nudity?), *UHU*, J4, H9, Jun 1928, 66–67.

made to the depicted rituals; rather, the authors argue in general terms for the historical pedigree and moral value of nudism (the later article), and the health-giving properties of sunlight:

Light is a powerful stimulus to life, especially in the period of growth, as for plants so for humans and animals. In low-sunlight months the growth of the infant organism is held back. Light and sunshine influence the human spirit: they improve the atmosphere and increase the pleasure and power of work.⁵⁵

The notion of sunlight as *invigorating*, and in particular as (re-)generating manly, physical strength in healthy individuals, was central to the physical regime of Hans Suren, outlined in *Der Mensch und die Sonne (Man and Sunlight)* (1924);⁵⁶ the photographs in this massively bestselling book also closely resemble *UHU*'s geometric male groupings.⁵⁷ Suren's ideologically saturated readings of his own images thus provide a vital contemporary context, missing from the *UHU* articles.

For Suren, open-air gymnastics represents a nationalist imperative:

Using every means possible, with unflagging energy, a nation should be united in the will to promote the strength of its people. ... Physical exercise will only make its true, noble, physical, and spiritual influences felt when it is practised in the form of gymnastics. Young people should not regard their goal to be breaking records but the power of the health and beauty of their own fully trained bodies. The photographs in this book display people as symbols of strength and health. Their bodies, governed by firm character, assure a better future. It is the duty of those with high aspirations to steel and train their bodies in such manner.⁵⁸

The rigid uniformity of Suren's male gymnastic patterns symbolizes a voluntary and absolute submission to the will of the social body – a will defined unequivocally as the cause of German national renewal. The geometric array, in this ultra-masculine performance, projects a resolutely militaristic ideal: the men's sleek, *irreducible*

⁵⁵ "Das Licht ist ein starker Lebensreiz, besonders während der Zeit des Wachstums, wie für die Pflanze, so für Mensch und Tier. In sonnenarmen Monaten bleibt das Wachstum des kindlichen Organismus zurück. Licht und Sonne beeinflussen die menschliche Psyche; sie bessern die Stimmung und erhöhen Arbeitsfreudigkeit und Arbeitskraft." Dr Ernst Tobias, "Vom Umgang mit der Sonne", *UHU*, (J1), H10, Jul 1925, 7.

⁵⁶ Hau, *The Cult of Health and Beauty*, 189–92.

⁵⁷ According to Karl Toepfer, *Der Mensch und die Sonne* ran through 68 editions (250,000 copies) in its first year of publication: Toepfer, "Nudity and Modernity," 68. Michael Hau gives the same figure, but as the total of copies sold by 1945: Hau, *The Cult of Health and Beauty*, 189. The source for the figure is not included by either author. The book's commercial and popular success was remarkable, in either case.

⁵⁸ Preface to the first edition of Hans Suren, *Der Mensch und die Sonne* (1924), from Kaes, Jay, and Dimendberg, *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 678.

bodies, rather than declaring their supple, organic identity, are “steeled” and “trained” as tools of resistance.⁵⁹ The gymnastic apparatus – including bows and arrows, spears and projectiles – bears its warlike intent almost undisguised.

The paradox of the male gymnastic pattern, from which it draws its peculiar resonance, lies in the symbolic connection between the militarized nudes and the organic world within which they manifest. At one level, *UHU*'s male figures are denaturalized: the warrior guise, as a conventional marker of assertive masculinity, de-eroticizes the body – the female nude warrior also appears in *UHU*, in April 1928, declaring her chaste, modern identity.⁶⁰ The geometric array, maintaining the rigid separation of naked performers, further guarantees the suppression of the body's erotic energy. Yet, as Suren insists, the “strength and health” of the modern body is discovered not its machine-like capacities, but in a mystical organic union with the cosmos:

There is a purity, a sacredness, in our natural nakedness. We experience a marvellous revelation in the beauty and strength of the naked body, transfigured by godlike purity shining from the clear and open eye that mirrors the entire depth of a noble and questing soul. Placed in the bright frame of exalted nature, the human body finds its most ideal manifestation.⁶¹

The symbolic ideal embodied in Suren's photographs – and, by association, in *UHU*'s male gymnast images – was not of organic community, but of *apotheosis*: the body's “ideal manifestation” described its incorporation within the mythic body of the nation. The “purification” of the masculine body in sunlight, and its muscular self-abnegation within the militarized pattern, prepared it to merge, symbolically, with the sublimated bodies of the fallen.

⁵⁹ See above, footnote 38.

⁶⁰ “Eine Frau in der Sonne” (A woman in the sun), photo-spread, *UHU*, J4, H7, Apr 1928, 72–73.

⁶¹ Preface to Suren, *Der Mensch und die Sonne*, from Kaes, Jay, and Dimendberg, *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 678.

The Mechanized Body

A panoramic view of *UHU*'s nudist utopia, in its 1928 ascendancy, reveals the magazine's characteristic liberal impulse toward reconciliation and synthesis. Such reconciliation can, however, only be deferred; beyond the broad thematic unities – nude figures, sunlight, natural settings – the photographs project conflicting ideals, whose multiple, shifting perspectives create, at best, an illusory sense of convergence. In terms of symbolic intention, the nude gymnasts of "Überschätzung der Nacktheit?", of June 1928, are not simply adult counterparts of the elfin children in "Maien-Sonne am Strand" from the previous month's issue: the athletes' "exalted nature", symbolic of heroic struggle and self-sacrifice, is diametrically opposed to the maternal, nurturing Eden of *UHU*'s idealized childhood. The photography of the female nude is similarly conflicted, projecting both a modern, permissive sexuality and its opposing ideal: the de-eroticization and moral emancipation of the female body through daylight nudity. The dichotomy is made explicit in a photo-spread in "Das Nackte und Wir" (The nude and us), from December 1927,⁶² showing images of a sunlit nude huntress (a mythological Diana), and stage-lit lascivious dancers, with didactic captions: "Modern open-air photograph: informal attitude of a body that is used to moving about in light and air./The height of fashion in nude photographs: staged pose, unnatural posture (high-heeled shoes!)"⁶³ The unclothed modern body, in this moralistic view, can be liberated from its carnal associations, to become, potentially, the site and symbol of new class and gender identities, and of new relations with the natural world.⁶⁴ *UHU*'s utopian nudism, declaring the chaste, abstract beauty of the youthful body, here repudiates the "fashionable" eroticism on which many other of the magazine's female nudes implicitly depend.

⁶² "Das Nackte und wir" (The nude and us), photo-spread, *UHU*, J4, H3, Dec 1927, 66-67. Figure 1, discussed above, comes from the same article.

⁶³ "Moderne Freilichtaufnahme: Ungezwungene Haltung eines Körpers, der gewohnt ist, sich in Licht und Luft zu tummeln./Die große Mode der Aktaufnahmen: Gestellte Pose, unnatürliche Haltung (Stöckelschuhe!)," photo-captions from "Das Nackte und Wir," pages 66-7.

⁶⁴ Hau, *The Cult of Health and Beauty*, 176.

The resolution of *UHU*'s conflicted symbolism of the nude was achieved not by the eventual dominance of one or other ideal, but by the diminution, and ultimate disappearance, of *all* nude photography from the magazine's visual content. In the broadest terms, the trend describes the displacement of *UHU*'s organic modernism – the tradition of Expressionism and the return to nature – by a machine modernist embrace of the technological, rationalized future.⁶⁵ Sporadically throughout the 1925–29 period, and increasingly toward the turn of the decade, *UHU* presented this alternative idealism in its body imagery, describing a synthesis not with the natural world but with the material forms and configurations of the machine. In marked contrast to *UHU*'s organic utopias, nudity is all but absent from these photographs: a single image from an April 1928 feature on American slimming technology – an elaborate April Fools joke, as revealed in the following issue – parodically captures the incongruous presence of a *naked* woman in a pristine future world of lab coats and electrical devices;⁶⁶ a photo-spread in the following pages reasserts the proper symbolic order, with clothed, sleeping women geometrically aligned within the expansive, logical body of the machine.

The ideal reconciliation parodied in the sleeping women photograph is intrinsically authoritarian, with passive bodies moulded, and mutually configured, within the rationalist scheme; another photo from “Ein neuer Schlankheits-Apostel” shows the calf of a would-be slimmer encased in electrified metal plates. The images evince a phenomenon described by Matthew Biro: the re-emergence in later Weimar visual culture of the “cyborg”, the prosthetically reconstructed or mechanically enhanced human figure. As Biro notes, these new visions of hybridized humanity express little of the ambivalence to technology found earlier in the decade – an ambivalence exemplified, in Biro's account, by the “Dada cyborg” photomontages of Raoul

⁶⁵ Andreas Huyssen finds a similar dichotomy in the film *Metropolis*, which he describes as vacillating between “two opposing views of modern technology which were both part of Weimar culture”: on one hand, the legacy of Expressionism, stressing technology's oppressive and destructive potential, on the other, the emerging “technology cult” of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Huyssen, “The Vamp and the Machine,” 223.

⁶⁶ “Ein neuer Schlankheits-Apostel” (A new apostle of slimness), *UHU*, J4, H7, Apr 1928, 49.

Hausmann, and by Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*.⁶⁷ In the visual culture of the later Weimar period, by contrast, cybernetic imagery increasingly projected a technocratic, and authoritarian myth of progress, notably in the work of reactionary modernists such as Ernst Jünger.⁶⁸ Mia Fineman describes a similar normative trajectory in the work of progressive Weimar artists, with the grotesque, fragmented bodies of Otto Dix's 1920 disabled veteran series re-emerging as fully formed machine-human hybrids, in works such as Heinrich Hoerle's *Monument to the Unknown Protheses* of 1930. For Fineman, Hoerle's painting represents "the thorough re-integration of this technologically rehabilitated body into the postwar industrial infrastructure", with the artist paying ironic tribute to "the hollow functionalism of modern man reimagined as a faceless prosthetic god".⁶⁹

In *UHU*'s photography of human patterns, the technological ascendancy of the late 1920s can be observed in the increasing dominance of regular geometric arrays, and – as in Hoerle's *Monument* – of the grid in particular. The shift is most pronounced in the imagery of leisure, a staple theme of *UHU*'s photography throughout the 1920s, and the arena in which the magazine's ideal moderns project both their communal identity and their emancipated subjectivity. Whereas holiday features from the 1924–27 period include light-hearted 'performances' of machine modernity, photographs from the end of the decade suggest a more resolute investment in the technological ideal. A photo-spread of November 1928, for example, titled "Die Großstadt braucht Hallenschwimmbäder!" (The metropolis needs indoor swimming pools!), illustrates a "French invention", in which novice swimmers, suspended from a gantry, practise the movements that appear on a chart above their heads in response to shouted

⁶⁷ Biro, *The Dada Cyborg*, 105–52; Huyssen, "The Vamp and the Machine."

⁶⁸ Biro cites, in particular, Jünger's book-length essay *Der Arbeiter (The Worker)*, 1932, and his photomontage book *Die veränderte Welt (The Transformed World)*, of 1933: Biro, "The New Man as Cyborg," 97–103. The selected images from *Die veränderte Welt* in Biro's essay powerfully suggest the propagandist potential of machine modernist patterns.

⁶⁹ Fineman, "Ecce Homo Protheticus," 108.

instructions.⁷⁰ A photo-page from two years later deposits these machine-age swimmers face down in the sand, still forming a perfect grid, and with the instructors looming over them dictating the movement of their limbs (fig. 11).⁷¹ The geometric array, as the figure of rationalized leisure, represents the voluntary alignment of the modern body, and of modern subjectivity, with the totalizing imperatives of the machine.

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The diverse iterations of the human grid in *UHU*'s photography of the late 1920s contained the elements of a potent symbolic synthesis. At the immediate level, as the product of *UHU*'s discursive engagement with contemporary visual culture, the grid's muscular presence signified the consolidation of the technocratic modern ideal, and of machine modernism as its formal and expressive language. In the crisis conditions of late Weimar, however, the grid also increasingly projected its other resonant symbolic identity, as the structural pattern form of industrialized warfare. Whilst *UHU* consistently avoided militaristic imagery, and published keynote articles promoting a liberal internationalism,⁷² its editors could hardly have been unaware of the latent militarism of geometric human patterns – what Blaise Cendrars called the “tremendous unity” of “swarming squadrons ... German chemicals, the breechblock of a 75”.⁷³ For some Weimar commentators at least, the militaristic resonances of synchronized dance, and of American popular culture in general, were inescapable. Alfred Polgar writes, in 1926, of the “magic of militarism”

⁷⁰ “Die Großstadt braucht Hallenschwimmbäder!” (The metropolis needs indoor swimming pools!), photo-spread, *UHU*, J5, H2, Nov 1928, 30–31.

⁷¹ See, also: “Massenturnen der Sportstudentinnen im Berliner Stadion” (Mass exercises of sports students in Berlin Stadium), photo-illustration from “Die Sportstudentin” (“The [female] sports student”), *UHU*, J4, H8, May 1928, 58–59; also, the regimented swimmers illustrated in “Der Herr Ehrenpräsident eröffnet das Schwimmfest” (“The honorary president opens the swimming gala”), *UHU*, J6, H9, Jun 1930, 80–81.

⁷² The leading article in *UHU*'s September 1927 issue consisted of a ten-page discussion on the unification of Europe: “V.S.E. Die Vereinigten Staaten von Europa?” (“U.S.E. The United States of Europe?”), *UHU*, J3, H12, Sept 1927, 2–11. See also, “10 Jahre Frieden: Ein Film für Vergeßliche” (“Ten years of peace: A film for the forgetful”), *UHU*, J5, H2, Nov 1928, 13–21.

⁷³ Blaise Cendrars, writing of his friend Fernand Léger's “sudden revelation of the *depth* of the present day”, quoted in Willett, *The New Sobriety*, 31. The original source is not cited.

of the Tiller Girls performances: “The trained precision, the straight lines, the regular rhythmic beat ... the obedience to invisible but ineluctable orders, the marvellous ‘drill’, the submersion of the individual into the group...”; Herbert Ihering goes even further, describing American cinema as “the new international militarism. It is advancing. It is more dangerous than Prussianism.”⁷⁴ As the authors’ comparisons suggest, the pattern forms of the consumerist utopia could, all too easily, project the ideals of extreme nationalism.

A photo-page from *UHU*, June 1930, hints at the authoritarian tendency of the new decade’s human patterns. The photograph shows four clothed athletes, male and female, cheerfully configured “Im Gebälk des Springturms” (In the timberwork of the high-diving board) (fig. 12). As a vision of the sporting body, or of ideal sociability, it is quite unlike *UHU*’s characteristic 1920s imagery of emancipated, physicalized leisure. The constriction of the figures, and the physical dominance of the diagonal grid, recalls a memorable, and atypical, composition from 1926, of policeman gymnasts strenuously arrayed within the perpendiculars of a climbing frame.⁷⁵ Like the earlier image, the principal relationship in “Im Gebälk” is between the individuals and their containing form, not the social interaction of the human group; its symbolic vision of the modern body reaches implicitly towards the same masculinized, authoritarian ideal as the policemen’s performance, valorizing bodily submission to an unyielding abstract principle. *UHU*’s sunlit gymnasts of 1930, captioned in other photo-pages as “strong” and “toughened” (abgehärtete),⁷⁶ betray the magazine’s acutely conflicted idealism:⁷⁷ the geometric human pattern, the

⁷⁴ Both quotations are taken from Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, 180.

⁷⁵ “Vom Schutzmann zum Schutzengel” (From policeman to guardian angel), *UHU*, J2, H12, Sept 1926, 112.

⁷⁶ “Die abgehärtete Familie” (The toughened family), title page photo, *UHU*, J5, H11, Aug 1929, 9.

⁷⁷ The title page of the following issue, *UHU*, J5, H12, Sept 1929, continues with the theme of muscular masculinity. The photograph, captioned “Ein starker Mann” (“A strong man”) shows a sunlit beach with two smiling young women on the shoulders of their male companion. A photo-page from October 1930 (*UHU*, J7, H1, Oct 1930, 43) goes a step further, showing a male athlete holding a swimsuit-clad woman aloft by one raised arm. The caption reads: “Wie man heute die Frau auf Händen trägt” (How one carries the woman by hand nowadays).

symbol of modernism's technological utopia, simultaneously invokes the "tremendous unity" of a militarized social order.

[END]

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