

The Body Builder and Beauty Contests

Caroline Daley

On seeing body builder, Eugen Sandow, walking down the street, a woman in Wellington exclaimed, in a loud voice, 'Why, he's just a MAN!' Her comment amused Sandow so much that he included it in one of his many publications.² Sandow, the father of modern body building, was not used to being discussed in such a dismissive way.³ As he travelled and performed all over Australia and New Zealand, the press heaped praise upon him. His strongman show was 'wonderful'⁴ and 'amazing'⁵ but what really impressed the press and the public was his muscular display. Sandow began each performance standing on a revolving pedestal, flooded in light, wearing leopard-skin knickers and little else, flexing his mighty muscles and posing for his audience. For most antipodeans, Sandow was much more than just a man. He was the embodiment of perfect manhood, the ideal body, on full display. The Sandow Season was a scopophilia's nirvana.

Freud's idea of scopophilia, that 'looking itself is a source of pleasure' did not, of course, have currency in 1902-1903 Australasia.⁶ In recent years, though, the idea of the gaze has been widely used, especially with regard to film, to explore questions about gender and power aspects of viewing, allowing us to think about the body and spectatorship. Much of this literature, taking its lead from Laura Mulvey's work, has focused on the male gaze. Mulvey argued that: 'In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness'.⁷ For Mulvey, the active, controlling gaze was male, a tool of patriarchal oppression.⁸ Many have followed Mulvey's lead, assuming that the object of the gaze is and always was female, that the powerful viewing subject is eternally male.⁹ It is still common for women to be seen as more embodied than men.¹⁰ But since Mulvey's pioneering work the idea of a monolithic male gaze has been re-visioned. The idea of the female gaze, and female gazes, has been explored.¹¹ Homosexual and bisexual gazes have joined the heterosexual.¹² Black gazes have been looked into as well as white ones.¹³ The imperial gaze has been added into the equation.¹⁴ The gaze has been fractured; we are less certain than Mulvey about what we can see, about what the gaze discloses.

What people saw during the Sandow Season was quite revealing. Night after night Sandow's semi-naked body was on display for the pleasure of men and women. Although Sandow claimed that his show was a mere vehicle for his larger goal — improving the physical health of all — many saw the show as an end in itself.¹⁵ They went along to be entertained and titillated and they were not disappointed. Sandow was an early male example of Mulvey's notion of 'to be looked-at-ness' and many of those who looked and commented on his body were female.

As women looked at Sandow their gaze reflected but was not wholly conditioned by the current gender order. Never before had they had such a body to feast their eyes upon. Their pleasure in looking and power through looking

warrants discussion. These were modern women, enjoying a commercial spectacle, happy to commodify the body of a male entertainer. But as the women scoped Sandow, he was looking back at them and commenting on their bodies. Modernity came at a price. His aim of improving everyone's physical health and well-being had particular implications for women. Not only did he think that every woman had a duty to become a mother, he also thought every woman should aspire to have a perfect body. Within a few years of his antipodean tour, Sandow's view that the Venus de Milo encapsulated the perfect female form was being felt by women on the stage, and also by ordinary women. The father of modern body building was also one of the fathers of modern beauty contests. Sandow's gaze lingered long after the final curtain call of his only Australasian tour.

Perhaps because Sandow's tour was a modern leisure spectacle, it was not unproblematic for women. Before they could enjoy Sandow's muscles, careful negotiations had to be entered into. Sandow and his management team knew that they had to persuade the public, especially the female public, that paying to see a semi-naked man pose on a revolving pedestal was, if a little racy, still respectable.¹⁶ To reassure the public that the show was uplifting rather than unseemly, Sandow's promoter distributed press releases which reassured the public that there was 'nothing coarse or repulsive in his entertainment'.¹⁷ Instead, readers were informed, '[t]he whole performance was clean and accurate, and wholly free from the slightest offensiveness'.¹⁸

If women dismissed such reports as promoter puffery, they may have been heartened to read that society ladies had marvelled at Sandow's muscles. The 'A Woman's Letter Column' in the weekly *Bulletin* reassured women that elsewhere in Australia respectable women had gazed upon Sandow. As its Adelaide correspondent noted, just as the Sandow Season opened in Melbourne, and before he had visited Sydney, Newcastle and Brisbane, the Adelaide theatre he performed in 'has been crowded during the past two weeks by people who never had entered its doors before'.¹⁹ Further encouragement came from accounts that the wives of dignitaries were seen at the theatre. When Sandow took to the stage in Melbourne, Lady Tennyson, the wife of Victoria's governor-general, was in the audience.²⁰

For those women who remained unsure as to the propriety of gazing at Sandow, self-deception and humour could be employed to justify their presence in the audience. 'Priscilla', who wrote the 'Girls' Gossip' column in a Wellington paper noted that:

A number of women are wondering whether it is the 'correct thing' to go and see him, and some are waiting to see what others will do. But most of us are longing to watch the strong man. Aunt informs us she does not at all approve of such exhibitions, but she doats [sic] on the concertina, and has consequently taken a front seat in the circle!²¹

In the first half of the show, before Sandow took to the stage, 'Professor' McCann played the concertina.

While 'Priscilla' and her cronies decided that it was the 'correct thing' to go and see Sandow, many male commentators argued that respectable women did not belong in Sandow's audience. The *Bulletin* led the charge that women scoping Sandow was improper:

Now that Sandow has left Sydney a great many ladies are awaking from their dazed condition to realise that they went to publicly inspect the naked back and legs of a man to whom they hadn't even been introduced. They didn't fully realise it at the time, when the glamour of the strange [sic] man's corrugated stomach was on them, but now, in their calmer moments, it comes home to them like a revelation.²²

Sandow was 'indecent', as Norman Lindsay's 'The Sandow Craze' cartoon makes clear.²³ Women should not be looking. Women did not belong in the audience.



THE SANDOW CRAZE.

BEEFY LADY: "I could measure with 'im any day, but I wouldn't be so indecent."

A statue of Sandow adorned the window of shops selling his equipment. While reports on the women's pages indicate that many ladies enjoyed taking surreptitious peeks at the window display, Norman Lindsay's cartoon suggests that women found the whole Sandow craze indecent. Bulletin, 18 October 1902, p13.

If women did look and long for such a man, they were told that they were wasting their time on a man who is more machine than human:

Eugene [sic] Sandow, in abnormally developing muscle, has starved the finer functions, and in a bout with Venus would be badly bested by any ordinarily healthy man... We can't all be Sandows, but we can warn our women that they are wasting their pulsings and palpitations on a human machine which feels no responsive thrill.²⁴

By building his body into such magnificent proportions, Sandow had called the naturalness of the body into question. If women were seen in public to be longing for such a body, to be gazing with admiration on such a man, then they upset the naturalness of the gender order. By belittling and undermining women looking at Sandow, male commentators hoped to restore proper relations between men and women.



THE PORTION OF THE WOMAN.
"Can't see go, George, dear, one night—I should
so like to see a man."

Posters of Sandow were also gazed upon by women, encouraging them to rethink ideas and ideals of manliness. Bulletin, 30 October 1902, p 15.

Despite the protestations of some male journalists, women columnists who wrote about Sandow were happy to waste their pulsings and palpitations. The Brisbane author of 'Woman's World' sighed that most of the ladies 'no doubt, like Shakespeare's heroine, Rosalind, "wished that Heaven has made them such a man"'.²⁵ Some cartoonists also recognised that Australasian men were not always

manly enough. Such illustrations, alongside the words of women columnists and Sandow's own press releases, helped many women make up their minds to buy tickets for the Sandow Season.

When the women sat in the darkened theatre they saw a body the like of which they had never before seen in the flesh. The report of opening night in Adelaide is typical of columns written throughout Australasia during his tour:

As the curtain rose it revealed this physically perfect man stripped to the waist, wearing a leopard skin loin cloth and white tights on his legs, standing on a revolving pedestal with purple plush curtains in the background. The enthusiastic house gave Sandow a welcome that might have been accorded to a hero... The first part of his performance consisted of an exhibition of the phenomenal development of the 400 muscles of his body. Every pose and posture was a picture to be carried away in the memory. He applied the pressure, and his muscles became firm as steel, and then swinging around into a graceful attitude, Sandow was a living Hercules. He has studied the art of grace to perfection. The muscles were shown first in a state of repose, and then in a state of tension. The abdominal muscles were contracted, and produced the wonderful checkerboard arrangement of the fibres. The biceps (muscles of the upper arm), the triceps (the muscles of the back of the arm), the deltoid (muscles of the shoulder), and the trapezino [sic] (muscles which raise the shoulders) were shown in turn to the accompaniment of round after round of applause... When the prolonged applause had died away Sandow evidenced the extraordinary control he has over his muscular system by making his muscles literally dance. There is nothing gross or coarse about Sandow, he does not possess an ounce of superfluous flesh, he has a beautiful skin, and is, in fact, all quality.²⁶

Women who gazed on Sandow were said to watch him 'with half fear', 'speculating on him as a husband'.²⁷ Recent discussion on male body builders and their female admirers, though, suggests that the very art of bodybuilding mediated the power of women's gaze. Doug Aoki notes that male bodybuilders can look so much like a man that they begin to look like a woman. The development of their muscles 'in turn creates an oddly feminine delicacy at the joints, at wrist and ankle and waist'.²⁸ The *Bulletin* did note that Sandow had a waist 'that the boniest girl might envy'²⁹ and that he 'minced' rather than walked like a real man.³⁰ Sandow also set the pattern for body builders to come by paying 'fastidious attention to skin and hair'.³¹ While this may have appealed to women, other reports suggest that his look was more manly than Aoki's steroid-inflated, late twentieth-century body builders. To his contemporaries, Sandow was a 'veritable picture of manly strength and grace',³² the 'most perfectly developed man in the world',³³ the 'embodiment of perfect manhood'.³⁴ According to his audience, Sandow had not become so hyper-masculine that he became feminine.

If the muscles were all too much, women could take comfort in his Teutonic good looks. 'Priscilla' wrote: 'What appeals to Hebe about the champion athlete are his curls, aggressively tight little twists that seem to indicate his strength almost as plainly as his muscles'.³⁵ Several writers commented on his 'crisp and curly' fair hair³⁶ and his absence of body hair.³⁷ His skin was variously described as 'clear',³⁸ 'glossy',³⁹ shining like 'satin',⁴⁰ as 'soft as a woman's',⁴¹ 'as clear as a baby's'.⁴² Many reporters described him as 'beautiful'.⁴³

Most of these reports were written by men yet there was nothing in the press at the time indicating that antipodean men's sexuality was called into question if they

referred to another man as beautiful or commented on the smoothness of his body. Homoerotic boundaries of looking were not yet as fixed as female, heterosexual boundaries were. This fluidity in male sexuality allowed men to look, comment and admire Sandow's body, at the very time that women doing the same met with resistance.⁴⁴ By 1902 it had been established that respectable women should not look at naked male statues, let alone live models.⁴⁵ That these women looked, and discussed and wrote about what they saw upset the contemporary gender order. The power of their gaze lay in its transgressive nature. While some have argued that male gay discourse has enabled a female gaze and also created a safe space for a female gaze, the Sandow Season challenges such a chronology.⁴⁶ The women of Australasia may have had to engage in a little self-deception to reassure themselves that they had a right to look but once they bought the ticket they enjoyed the show.

The Sandow Season offered Australasian women a modern entertainment spectacle. From the orchestrated press releases to the carefully choreographed show, Sandow embodied modernity.⁴⁷ The women who attended his show were also very modern. They enjoyed a commercial show that commodified a semi-clad male body. Their admission price, though, was somewhat higher than their ticket stub indicated. For while many women gazed longingly on the perfect man, the power of their look was mediated by the fact that Sandow was watching them in return. As he stood on his pedestal 'the suspicion of a smile haunt[ed] the corners of his clear blue eyes as his closely-cropped, regularly shaped head turned to take a survey of the tiers of spectators'.⁴⁸ The power of his gaze came from the fact that so many women came to look at him.



Sandow's Own . . . Combined Developer

The Latest and Most Popular Means
for PHYSICAL CULTURE at Home.

WONDERFUL IN ITS EFFECTS.

Will serve the purposes of a whole
family.

It may be used as:

1. Wall Exerciser (for arms, body and legs).
2. Heavy Weight-Lifting Exerciser.
3. Chest Expander.
4. Pair of Light Dumb-Bells.

A Complete Set of Charts supplied with each
Apparatus.

S. Hoffnung & Co., Ltd.,
SYDNEY AND BRISBANE.

Sole Agents for Australia.

Quotations supplied to the Trade.

While Sandow featured prominently in this advertisement, women were also being encouraged to exercise the Sandow-way, using his patented combined developer. Bulletin, 26 July 1902, p 23.

Although Sandow did not talk on stage, off stage he was voluble. In press interviews, during official welcomes, at 'expositions' held for doctors and prominent citizens, as well as in his writings, Sandow spread his gospel. His main message was that all people had a duty, as good citizens, to follow the Sandow System of physical culture and thus improve the human race. Everyone should spend 15-20 minutes a day performing Sandow's exercises using his patented brand of exercise equipment.

By adopting the Sandow System it might be assumed that women gained power, literally. They developed muscles and strength and thus disrupted the conflation of muscularity and masculinity.⁴⁹ But just as their looking at Sandow was 'made safe' by the presence of men and the public venue of the theatre, so their adoption of his system was also 'made safe'.⁵⁰ Like contemporary body builders, women who took up the Sandow System were discouraged from becoming 'too extreme'.⁵¹ Sandow's aim was to enhance their femininity, to create the perfect female. While in Australia, Sandow enunciated on women and his system:

The great objection to women exercising — namely, the fear of becoming muscular — is quite without foundation. It cannot be too often repeated that woman is not simply a weaker man: she is physically an entirely different being... In women the muscles simply become firm, close-knit, and well-rounded, and show under the layer of fatty tissue intervening between muscle and skin only in soft, hardly discernible masses, just sufficiently to give a delicate moulding to the form.⁵²

Masculine muscles were hard, but women had no reason to fear that their bodies would ever achieve the 'hard lines and angular shapes' of men's bodies.⁵³ Women could not share in the phallic power of the muscular body.⁵⁴

The well-rounded feminine body was fecund and attractive to men. Sandow preached that women who adopted his system of exercises welcomed natural child-birth:

Married ladies are frequently writing to me, testifying as to the value of my system of Physical Culture, which, as they say, has made them such healthy mothers ... women should remember that in properly developing the trunk muscles they are not only saving themselves untold agony, but are really building for the generations to come.

If a woman persistently neglects to exercise those muscles which Nature has provided her to assist her in the great crises of life, she will have to pay the price — a double price of pain to herself and risk to her offspring. Civilisation has rendered maternity a painful, dangerous and tedious business.⁵⁵

Given the concerns in Australasia at the time about declining birth rates, his claims were welcomed by many. Women might enjoy exercising the Sandow way but their pleasure was a by-product of their preparation for childbearing and motherhood. This was their societal duty.

Women also had a duty to make themselves attractive to men. The 'Sandow Girl' was pleasing to the male eye. There was nothing masculine about her. Indeed, like the Venus de Milo, she should be the object of men's adoring gazes.

Sandow was convinced that women should aspire to attain the Venus de Milo's measurements. Australasian women who read his magazine would already have

been aware of this.⁵⁶ To assist women with this goal, he invented the Symmetrion, a piece of exercise equipment for women, designed to 'impart to the female form perfect symmetry of figure and grace of carriage'.⁵⁷ Sandow gathered together 'a bevy of Symmetrion girls' to tour Britain, 'giving practical demonstrations of the marvellous beauty-creating powers of that apparatus'.⁵⁸ Women's physical culture was moving away from the privacy of the home or gymnasium and into a very public arena. The crowds who came to watch the 'Symmetrion girls' were not necessarily interested in perfecting their exercise technique but because the young women were supposedly on display for the greater good of women's health, the 'Symmetrion girls' had a certain legitimacy.

Each Symmetrion girl was a living Venus de Milo, touring in the name of women's health and beauty.⁵⁹ While there had been a long tradition in the west of strongwomen on stage, Sandow's women were not circus freaks and vaudeville sideshow performers.⁶⁰ His aim was quite different. He wanted to create a generation of Sandow girls, and the Geelong born actor, Carrie Moore, assisted the cause when she performed in a production of *The Dairymaids* in London in 1906. During the performance, she toyed with 'figuarative ton-weights' and while this was regarded as 'a trifle bizarre', given the supposed nature of the play, it meant Moore was soon viewed as the ideal physical culture girl. Indeed, the *Free Lance* cast her as the Sandow Girl, an imperial replacement for the more languid Gibson Girl. Readers were informed that the Sandow Girl, who 'cultivates her biceps', has 'highly developed proportions'.⁶¹ Moore was an object for women, but mainly men, to gaze upon. Sandow's mission to 'improve' the bodies of women was taking effect, at least on the stage.

In 1908 J C Williamson staged *The Dairymaids* in Sydney. A group of 'Sandow girls', led by Miss Dango, performed exercises on stage as part of the night's entertainment. Wearing a long cashmere costume, which clung to her body, Miss Dango also sang 'The Sandow Girl'.⁶² Antipodean women all over the world were performing to Sandow's tune.

Some female performers took allusions to the Venus de Milo even further. Melburnian Pansy Montague became Venus as part of her show. Montague, known on stage as 'The Modern Milo' and 'La Milo', embraced the contemporary craze for living statuary. Covering her body with white enamel paint and some diaphanous drapery, she appeared throughout Australia and New Zealand in 1905 posing as the Venus de Milo, Sappho, Hebe and Diana.⁶³ Audiences were enticed with the promise that this was 'The Female Form...displayed in all its essential detail'. They were also reassured that this display was done 'with unquestionable delicacy and taste'.⁶⁴ Reports indicated that 'The Modern Milo' did not suffer from 'bunches of muscles' or 'abnormal sinews'. Instead, as Sandow had stressed, she embodied 'natural beauty unadorned and unassisted by any artificial aids'.⁶⁵ When she went to London, after her success at home, Sandow welcomed her as 'the new Venus', wrote about her in his magazine and even made her his cover girl.⁶⁶

The performances of Carrie Moore and Pansy Montague were a logical outcome of Sandow's stage presence in Australasia and elsewhere in the world. His performance was said to be classical and refined, a work of art rather than a tawdry vaudeville spectacle. The celebration of his body helped to legitimate women taking on similar roles, displaying their bodies in the name of art and

physical culture.⁶⁷ This legitimisation did not stop with professional performers. An important legacy of Sandow's tour was the way ordinary women were now encouraged to develop and display their bodies. At one of Montague's Christchurch performances, women from the local physical culture classes were encouraged to attend so that they could witness 'the Higher Development of Women'.⁶⁸ Women who had once just looked on, were now being encouraged to put their bodies on the line and in the limelight too.

Physical culture classes for women, organised along Sandow lines, were held throughout Australasia in the first decade of the twentieth century. In gymnasiums and halls young women and girls developed their chests and gripped dumb bells in the name of health and beauty. The public was reassured that women who attended these classes were preparing themselves for their proper roles in life. Dr Thacker, the 1905 judge at Fred Hornibrook's annual physical development competition for women commented that 'it is impossible for women to have the splendid physical and muscular development of these ladies without having a corresponding development of all those vital organs which go to make a perfectly healthy woman'.⁶⁹ Women physical culturists were making themselves 'more womanly'.⁷⁰ But exercise did not only prepare women's ovaries. Physical culture classes culminated in competitions, and at these competitions women's bodies were judged not just in terms of overall physical development, but also on the basis of who had the 'best skin'. Women's impetus to exercise may have been health, but increasingly their success was being judged in terms of beauty.

The bodies of women and girls who attended physical culture classes were coming under increasing comment and scrutiny. Previously such discussions had focused on women's clothed bodies but now their semi-clad physiques were the object of discussion. Sandow encouraged this by attempting to organise what in effect was a beauty competition, open 'to all ladies of the British Empire'.⁷¹ It is likely that he took his lead from his American counterpart, Bernarr Macfadden, who had announced a similar competition for women, with a \$1000 prize, in December 1902.⁷² Sandow issued his challenge in May 1903 and offered a more humble prize, one guinea, to the woman whose photograph received the largest number of reader votes.⁷³ Unlike all the other photographic competitions he ran in his magazine, after a couple of months Sandow had to announce that since the 'ladies have failed to answer my invitation to forward their photos for competition', the competition was withdrawn for the moment. He hoped that it would be resurrected at a later date; it never was.⁷⁴ As one 'lady reader' pointed out, the reason women did not enter was not due to a lack of enthusiasm for such competitions but because 'we find how far we fall short of the true ideal of healthy beauty'.⁷⁵

Although Sandow never again tried to run a competition for women, he remained interested in the subject and published articles and editorials in his magazine, detailing other contests in Britain and the United States.⁷⁶ He made no mention of Australasian contests but, just as his magazine ceased publication, a 'beauty show' was advertised in Christchurch, the home of the Sandow System in New Zealand. The contest was to be held as part of the city's 1907 international exhibition. In association with a physical development competition for men and women, women were also to be judged on having the 'best shaped arm and

shoulder' and the 'neatest foot and ankle (bare)'. There was also to be a prize for the 'prettiest girl in Christchurch' as judged by the audience.⁷⁷ Howls of protest by various groups and individuals followed the announcement. The Christchurch Women's Christian Temperance Union, while supporting 'every legitimate effort to promote physical culture among both men and women', felt the proposed



A Shame.

Geo. was unanimously proclaimed judge of the beauty show. Several bald headed gentlemen wanted to head him off, but George filled the bill gloriously and his terse description of the whole function is "That it was a shame to take the money."

The Christchurch beauty contest may not have occurred, but that did not stop the city's cartoonists from speculating on what might have happened. The contestant, in her revealing costume, is clearly a physical culturist. Exhibition Sketcher, 23 March 1907, p 7.

beauty show was a 'vulgar' attempt at money making and a challenge to women's modesty.⁷⁸ Supporters claimed the show would be 'rational and wholesome, and highly educative' for competitors and spectators.⁷⁹ The show's organiser suggested that "'Sandow girl'" and statuesque posing items of this description are perfectly common in other parts of the world'.⁸⁰ But the detractors won the day. The 'beauty show' was abandoned, replaced instead with a prize for the best answer to the question 'Why Didn't the Beauty Show?'.⁸¹

Later in 1907, though, women in Australasia entered a less controversial 'world's beauty challenge' run by the Australian magazine, the *Lone Hand*. This

was the Australasian section of an international quest, organised by the *Chicago Tribune*.⁸² Over five months, women sent in their photographs, along with their vital statistics (age, height, weight, waist measurement, glove size, bust measurement, shoe size, colouring and complexion). The competition was open to all women over sixteen years of age, except actresses and professional models. The Carrie Moores and Pansy Montagues had to give the woman on the street a chance to have her body judged in public. Each month a selection of photographs were reproduced in the magazine. Ordinary women were now the object of the gaze, ‘looked at and displayed’ for the enjoyment of the public.⁸³

The *Lone Hand* competition differed from the proposed Christchurch competition in several ways. As part of an international competition, it came with a degree of respectability, especially since the American contest refused entry to women of the stage. The contest was also cast in a nationalistic light. No prize was offered, save an all-expenses paid trip for the winner and her chaperone to the world final, to be held in either America or Europe. The ruse of national pride was to be used again and again in years to come, as such contests became a search for ‘Miss Australia’ and ‘Miss New Zealand’, rather than just a quest for an international beauty.⁸⁴ Finally, rather than being judged in person by the public, these women would in the first instance be judged by photograph alone, and by a panel of judges, including a physical culture expert.⁸⁵ State winners might be asked to travel to Sydney for the final decision, which would be based on a personal interview with the judging panel.

The decision to include a physical culture expert in the judging panels of the competition blurred the lines between women’s healthy interest in physical culture and the increasing desire by some for ordinary women to display their bodies in public. Most of the finalists enjoyed exercise and a healthy lifestyle. Although the Victorian winner, Alice Buckridge, protested that ‘you mustn’t call me a Sandow girl’, she had belonged to a gymnasium in Hawthorn, where she swung clubs and lifted dumbbells through the winter months.⁸⁶ The New South Wales winner, Alice Hoppe, had taken a Sandow course in her youth.⁸⁷ In Queensland the judge found it difficult to reach a final selection, but the ‘views and analyses of measurements’ by their physical culture expert proved to be most helpful.⁸⁸ He felt that the runner-up would probably be successful after a few years of exercise whereas the winner, Daisy Clifton, had taken a course of physical culture and showed all the benefits of it.⁸⁹

The eventual winner of the *Lone Hand* quest was Alice Buckridge.⁹⁰ She was ‘the antithesis’ of the American Gibson Girl, just like her compatriot, Carrie Moore.⁹¹ But although she did not look like an American, she had just won what was in effect an American competition. The modern beauty contest, an American invention, had made its way to Australasia.⁹²

In the years before Miss Australia and Miss New Zealand quests — both competitions began in 1926, although they were not held every year thereafter — Australasian women entered more and more beauty competitions.⁹³ Many were held in association with movie theatres and required women to submit a photograph of themselves, which was screened in the interval and voted on by the cinema’s audience each night for a week or so.⁹⁴ Beauty shows were also run by theatre companies. J C Williamson organised one in association with a Melbourne

season of the pantomime *Mother Goose*. Winners of this competition were offered engagements with his theatre company and were also filmed, the film being shown as the 'pantomime beauty show'.⁹⁵ Even the *Lone Hand* ran another competition, 'to discover the *most beautiful women* in Australia and New Zealand'. This time the expert judging panel was replaced by a popular vote and a cash prize was offered.⁹⁶ Ideas of physical culture had given way to desires to boost flagging circulation. Votes could only be recorded on coupons printed within the magazine. Beauty contests at the beach also became increasingly popular after the Great War, as briefer bathing costumes revealed more and more of women's bodies to the voting public.⁹⁷

In 1902, rather than 1922, the idea of a bathing beauties contest would have shocked the sensibilities of many Australasians. No respectable woman would have entered a competition where she was required to parade in front of the public wearing only her swimming costume and a smile. Yet that is what Eugen Sandow did, night after night, as he toured Australia and New Zealand. Through his systematic exercise message, Sandow tried to cloak his semi-naked body in respectability but he knew as well as his audience that much of his appeal was as a spectacular entertainment rather than as a preacher of physical culture.

Sandow's tour offered the women of Australasia a transgressive moment. By sitting in the audience, gazing upon a marvelous, muscled body, these modern women asserted their power to look. They feasted their eyes on Sandow's flesh and 'wished that Heaven ha[d] made them such a man'. It was women's turn to scope a semi-clad male body, and while many men worried about what the women were seeing and its impact on the gender order, the women enjoyed themselves.

But as with so many aspects of modernity, women's gaze came at a price. Sandow, like his female audience, was looking into the future. What he saw was not a world full of powerful women watching men's bodies but of powerful men controlling women's bodies. Sandow did not think this control was negative. He believed that his exercise system helped women, since it encouraged them to have more children. In this way his system strengthened rather than undermined the Victorian gender order. Women would continue to be primarily wives and mothers. His exercise system would simply better equip them for their natural role. But he also challenged contemporary gender relations. This challenge extended beyond the brief moment when women were allowed to enjoy his body. Sandow was advocating a new definition of feminine beauty and body shape. His encouragement of women such as Carrie Moore and Pansy Montague and of women who attended physical culture classes, led to physical culture competitions, which in turn played a part in legitimising beauty contests. Sandow returned women's looks by asserting a very direct and powerful male gaze at women's bodies.

By the time Beryl Mills was crowned as the first Miss Australia and Thelma McMillan won the inaugural Miss New Zealand crown, Sandow was dead. It is unlikely that either of these young women had heard of Sandow or were familiar with his exercise program. Yet in certain respects, he helped them win their titles. The father of modern body building also helped father modern beauty contests.

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- 1 An earlier version of this paper was given at the Women and Modernity Conference, University of Melbourne, 2000. I would like to thank the conference organisers and participants, especially Judith Smart, for comments on my paper and for providing a forum to discuss the wider issue of women's relationships with modernity. Deborah Montgomerie, Joe Zizek and David Chapman have read this paper and made valuable suggestions. The work is richer for their contributions, and I thank them for that.
- 2 Eugen Sandow, *Body-Building, or Man in the Making: How to Become Healthy & Strong*, London, 1904, p 115. Emphasis in original.
- 3 The fullest account of Sandow's life is contained in David L. Chapman, *Sandow the Magnificent: Eugen Sandow and the Beginnings of Bodybuilding*, Urbana and Chicago, 1994. Chapman discusses Sandow's Australasian tour, pp 140-48.
- 4 *Auckland Star*, 19 November 1902, p 2.
- 5 *Adelaide Register*, 13 August 1902, p 3.
- 6 Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3, 1975, p 8.
- 7 *ibid.*, 11. Emphasis in original. Mulvey's work is heavily influenced by psychoanalytic theory. While I am interested in the core of her ideas, her largely ahistorical approach is obviously problematic.
- 8 Mulvey, *op. cit.*, p 7.
- 9 Classic texts using this idea include Mary Ann Doane, 'Film and the Masquerade—Theorising the Female Spectator', *Screen*, vol. 23, nos 3-4, 1982, pp 74-87; Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema*, London, 1982; E Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, New York, 1983. By 1988 the editors of a collection of essays on women as viewers of popular culture noted that 'the notion of a "male gaze" as dominant in all mainstream genres has since [Mulvey] become something of an orthodoxy'. Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment, 'Introduction', in Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment (eds), *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture*, London, 1988, p 5.
- 10 This is discussed in David Morgan, 'You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine: Reflections on the Male Body and Masculinities', in Sue Scott and David Morgan (eds), *Body Matters: Essays on the Sociology of the Body*, London, 1993, especially pp 69-71.
- 11 See, for example, Gamman and Marshment, eds, *op. cit.* More recently, Dan Streible has considered how women watched the film of an 1897 prize fight: 'Female Spectators and the Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight Film', in Aaron Baker and Todd Boyd (eds), *Out of Bounds: Sports, Media, and the Politics of Identity*, Bloomington, 1997, pp 16-47.
- 12 See, for example, Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory*, New York, 1988.
- 13 bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, Boston, 1992.
- 14 E Ann Kaplan, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze*, New York and Londo, 1997.
- 15 Sandow's larger goal is discussed in Caroline Daley, 'The Strongman of Eugenics, Eugen Sandow', *Australian Historical Studies*, forthcoming 2001.
- 16 Florenz Ziegfeld had an enormous influence on Sandow's decision to reveal more flesh in his shows and push back the borders of propriety. Chapman, *op. cit.*, pp 59-62.
- 17 *Manawatu Evening Standard*, 27 November 1902, p 2.
- 18 *ibid.*
- 19 *Bulletin*, 6 September 1902, p 14.
- 20 *Age*, 19 September 1902, p 7.
- 21 *Evening Post*, 13 December 1902, Supplement, p 2.
- 22 *Bulletin*, 8 November 1902, p 12.
- 23 *ibid.*, 18 October 1902, p 13.
- 24 *Sydney Sportsman*, 8 October 1902, p 2. For a scholarly discussion of the idea of man as a

- machine see Michael Anton Budd, *The Sculpture Machine: Physical Culture and Body Politics in the Age of Empire*, New York, 1997.
- 25 *Brisbane Courier*, 31 October 1902, p 9.
 - 26 *Adelaide Register*, 13 August 1902, p 3.
 - 27 *Bulletin*, 11 October 1902, p 10.
 - 28 Doug Aoki, 'Sex and Muscle: The Female Bodybuilder Meets Lacan', *Body & Society*, vol. 2, no. 4, 1996, pp 68-69.
 - 29 *Bulletin*, 13 September 1902, p 10.
 - 30 *ibid.*, 2 August 1902, p 26.
 - 31 Aoki, *op. cit.*, p 68.
 - 32 *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 6 October 1902, p 6.
 - 33 *Age*, 6 September 1902, p 10.
 - 34 *Brisbane Courier*, 31 October 1902, p 6.
 - 35 *Evening Post*, 13 December 1902, Supplement, p 2.
 - 36 *Bulletin*, 2 August 1902, p 26.
 - 37 *Bulletin*, 11 October 1902, p 10. The report noted, 'his barber must have had a busy time for the man of muscle shows no body hair at all'.
 - 38 *Argus*, 8 September 1902, p 7.
 - 39 *Age*, 8 September 1902, p 8.
 - 40 *Age*, 6 September 1902, p 10.
 - 41 *Referee*, 8 October 1902, p 1.
 - 42 *Southland Times*, 10 January 1903, p 2.
 - 43 *Bulletin*, 2 August 1902, p 26; *Adelaide Register*, 26 August 1902, p 6; *Argus*, 8 September 1902, p 7; *Bulletin*, 13 September 1902, p 10; *Referee*, 8 October 1902, p 10; *Wanganui Chronicle*, 27 November 1902, p 4; *Budget and Taranaki Weekly Herald*, 29 November 1902, p 22; *Press*, 20 December 1902, p 8.
 - 44 This fluidity is best discussed in George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay World, 1890-1940*, New York, 1994.
 - 45 Chapman, *op. cit.*, p 64.
 - 46 Suzanne Moore discusses women's gaze on the male body in the 1980s in 'Here's Looking at You, Kid!', in Gamman and Marshment, eds, *op. cit.*, pp 44-59.
 - 47 This is further discussed in Caroline Daley, 'Selling Sandow: Modernity and Leisure in Early Twentieth-Century New Zealand', *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2000, pp 241-61.
 - 48 *Age*, 8 September 1902, p 8.
 - 49 On this conflation see Alan Mansfield and Barbara McGinn, 'Pumping Irony: The Muscular and the Feminine', in Scott and Morgan, eds, *op. cit.*, p 49.
 - 50 The idea of body building being 'made safe' for women is discussed in Mansfield and McGinn, *op. cit.*, p 50.
 - 51 *ibid.*, p 63.
 - 52 *Sydney Mail*, 22 October 1902, p 1072.
 - 53 Richard Dyer, 'Don't Look Now—the Male Pin-Up', *Screen*, vol. 23, nos 3-4, 1982, p 71.
 - 54 *ibid.* Dyer is here discussing arguments found in Margaret Walters, *The Nude Male*, London, 1978.
 - 55 *Sydney Mail*, 22 October 1902, p 1072.
 - 56 *Sandow's Magazine*, December 1900, pp 403-08; June 1902, pp 420-25.
 - 57 *ibid.*, 19 January 1905, p 62.
 - 58 *ibid.*, 11 January 1906, p 33.
 - 59 As David Chapman noted to me in a personal communication, imitation of Greek statuary was also used as an excuse or justification to legitimise gazing at pictures of muscular men clad only in fig leaves.
 - 60 On this long tradition see Jan Todd, 'Bring on the Amazons: an Evolutionary History', in Joanna Frueh, Laurie Fierstein and Judith Stein (eds), *Picturing the Modern Amazon*, New York, 1999, pp 50-61.
 - 61 *Sandow's Magazine*, 24 May 1906, p 662. On Moore's career see 'Moore, Caroline Ellen', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 10, 1891-1939, Melbourne, 1986, pp 562-63.
 - 62 *SMH*, 3 February 1908, p 6. I am grateful to Jeanette Delamoire for first alerting me to this performance.

- 63 *Auckland Star*, 23 September 1905, p 10.
- 64 *ibid.*, 30 September 1905, p 8.
- 65 *NZH*, 7 October 1905, p 8.
- 66 *Sandow's Magazine*, 3 May 1906, pp 560-63. 'La Milo', as she was known in Britain, appeared on the cover of the 31 May 1906 issue of the magazine.
- 67 Of course, many women on the stage had long been revealing parts of their bodies, especially their legs, in the name of entertainment. The history of this is best discussed in Lois W Banner, *American Beauty*, New York, 1983. See also Robert C Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture*, Chapel Hill and London, 1991; Linda Mizejewski, *Ziegfeld Girl: Image and Icon in Culture and Cinema*, Durham and London, 1999. What Sandow offered women, and the women's managers, was a new cloak of respectability with which dress up the act, thus allowing the actress to undress on stage.
- 68 *Press*, 16 November 1905, p 1.
- 69 *ibid.*, 6 November 1905, p 6.
- 70 *Lyttelton Times*, 23 October 1906, p 5.
- 71 *Sandow's Magazine*, May 1903, pp 347-48.
- 72 Jan Todd, 'Bernarr Macfadden: Reformer of Feminine Form', *Journal of Sport History*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1987, p 71.
- 73 *Sandow's Magazine*, May 1903, p 348.
- 74 *ibid.*, July 1903, p 39.
- 75 *ibid.*, p 108.
- 76 *ibid.*, October 1903, pp 331-32; December 1903, p 408; February 1904, pp 143-44; April 1904, pp 247-48 and pp 301-03; 1 February 1906, pp 143-45.
- 77 *Lyttelton Times*, 12 March 1907, p 1.
- 78 *ibid.*, 14 March 1907, p 9.
- 79 *ibid.*, 15 March 1907, p 8.
- 80 *ibid.*, 19 March 1907, p 4.
- 81 *ibid.*, 21 March 1907, p 1.
- 82 *Lone Hand*, 1 November 1907, pp 12-15.
- 83 Mulvey, *op. cit.*, p 11.
- 84 Much of the scholarly literature on beauty contests deals with the theme of nationalism. See Colleen Ballerino Cohen, Richard Wilk and Beverly Stoeltje (eds), *Beauty Queens on the Global Stage: Gender, Contests, and Power*, New York and London, 1996; Sarah Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity*, Berkeley and London, 1999.
- 85 *Lone Hand*, 2 December 1907, p xxiv.
- 86 *ibid.*, 1 October 1908, p 632.
- 87 *ibid.*, p 634.
- 88 *ibid.*, 1 February 1909, p 410.
- 89 *ibid.*, pp 410-12.
- 90 *ibid.*, p 413.
- 91 *ibid.*, 1 October 1908, p 631.
- 92 On the Americanness of beauty contests see Candace Savage, *Beauty Queens: A Playful History*, New York, 1998, p 32.
- 93 The first Miss Australia quest is discussed by Judith Smart, 'Feminists, Flappers and Miss Australia: contesting the Meanings of Citizenship, Femininity and Nation in 1920s Australia'. An account of the first two Miss New Zealand contests can be found in Sandra Coney, *Standing in the Sunshine: A History of New Zealand Women Since They Won the Vote*, Auckland, 1993, pp 162-63.
- 94 For example, the Theatre Royal in Christchurch held such a competition in 1909. See *Christchurch Press*, 24 April-10 May 1909.
- 95 Reported in *Auckland Truth*, 23 October 1915, p 2.
- 96 *Lone Hand*, 1 August 1916, p 126. Emphasis in original.
- 97 On the link between bathing attire and beauty contests see Angela J Latham, 'Packaging Woman: The Concurrent Rise of Beauty Pageants, Public Bathing, and Other Performances of Female "Nudity"', *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 29, no. 3, 1995, pp 149-67. Passing mention of early beach beauty contests in Australasia can be found in Douglas Booth, 'Nudes in the Sand and Perverts in the Dunes', *Journal of Australian Studies*, no. 53, 1997, pp 172-73.