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**Citation for published version:**

Morris, N 2009, 'Naked in nature: naturism, nature and the senses in early 20th century Britain', *Cultural Geographies*, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 283-308. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474009105049>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1177/1474474009105049](https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474009105049)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Cultural Geographies

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# **Naked in Nature: naturism, nature and the senses in early twentieth century Britain**

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This is the author's final draft as submitted for publication. The final version was published in *Cultural Geographies* by SAGE Publications, UK (2009)

Cite As: Morris, N 2009, 'Naked in nature: naturism, nature and the senses in early 20th century Britain' *Cultural Geographies*, Vol 16, No. 3, 283-308.

DOI: 10.1177/1474474009105049

Made available online through Edinburgh Research Explorer

## **Abstract**

Advocates of naturist practice have long celebrated it as *the* authentic human-nature relationship, a way of re-kindling our connections with the natural world, and a means of achieving and maintaining physical, mental and spiritual health. Using Hans Surén's book *Man and Sunlight* (1927) as an example, this paper explores the importance of sensory perception to, and the embodied geographies of, naturism and the particular ways in which early twentieth century naturists conceptualised, valued and attached meaning to the relationship between the body and nature. In so doing, the paper outlines the ways in which naturist practice reflected contemporary European-wide debates on urbanism, nationhood, health, and nature, and highlights some of the connections between early naturist philosophy and contemporary phenomenological theory.

Key Words: Surén, naturism, senses, nature, phenomenology

## **Introduction**

Greetings to you, you who are sunlovers! You bear ardent longings in your hearts! Longings after warm sunshine, blue skies, light and nature; after victorious strength, spiritual loftiness, and childlike faith. Painfully do you endure the lash of drudgery and the disfavour of the times. Exultingly do you rejoice when the smallest beam of light gilds the altar of your longings. Out of passion for sunshine springs the noble shrine of loftiest idealism.<sup>1</sup>

Naturism occupies a paradoxical position in Western society. Advocates have celebrated it as *the* authentic human-nature relationship, a way of re-kindling our connections with the natural world, and a means of achieving and maintaining physical, mental and spiritual health. Yet, naturists have been, and still are, frequently vilified by the press, dismissed as

morally ambiguous cranks, and satirized by wider society. A complete history of naturism is yet to be written, but in recent years a small number of theorists from across the social sciences have begun to focus their attention on the practice of social nudity in Western cultures. This research has started to uncover the complex, often fragmentary, geographies and histories of naturist practice,<sup>2</sup> and has done much to highlight the sometimes contradictory moral frameworks through which nudity is conceptualised and understood.<sup>3</sup> It has also made valuable contributions to recent debates on the body (including its exposure and adornment)<sup>4</sup> and the politics of the gaze.<sup>5</sup> Yet to date (and despite a marked sensual turn<sup>6</sup> in the arts, humanities, and social sciences), the importance of sensory perception to, and the embodied geographies of, naturism and the particular ways in which naturists have conceptualised, valued and attached meaning to the relationship between the body and nature, have been largely neglected. Influenced by, and drawing on, the growing body of literature on the senses,<sup>7</sup> this paper offers a fresh perspective on naturist practice demonstrating not only the sensuous and dynamic nature of naturist experience, but also the ways in which particular social ideologies were conveyed through sensory values and practices of early twentieth century naturism.<sup>8</sup> In so doing, the paper adds weight to Bull *et al's* claim that the 'perceptual is *cultural* and *political*, and not simply (as psychologists and neurobiologists would have it) a matter of cognitive processes or neurological mechanisms located in the individual subject'.<sup>9</sup>

I focus specifically upon *Man and Sunlight* by Hans Surén (1895-1972) published in Britain in 1927 just as the fledgling British naturist movement was beginning to formalize and take shape.<sup>10</sup> The initial organisation of the movement is something of an enigma due to a significant absence of written records, although it is widely agreed that the first move toward 'organised naturism' occurred in 1922 when a small group of people, led by Harold Clare Booth (a.k.a. fflang), Mark Harold Sorensen (a.k.a. Chong) and Rex Wellbye

(a.k.a. Zex), began to meet in London to discuss the theory behind social nudity.<sup>11</sup> By the end of the 1930s, however, the number of private naturist clubs like the ‘Diogenes Sun Club’ and the ‘Sun Bathing Society’ (SBS) had grown rapidly and numerous naturist magazines and books were in circulation, including *Sun Bathing Review*, *Gymnos*, *Dawn*, *Verity*, J.M Seitz’s *Back to Nature*, Clarence Norwood’s *Nudism in England* and Maurice Parmelee’s *Nudism in Modern Life*. Any one of these texts would provide an interesting insight into early twentieth century naturist practice, but Surén’s book is significant for several reasons.<sup>12</sup> First, it is emblematic of the international cross-fertilisation of ideas which was occurring during this period, particularly between Germany and Britain (e.g. many early British naturists took up the pursuit after gaining personal experience of German *Freikorperkultur* or ‘free body culture’). Second, although it is important to acknowledge that Surén was not the first advocate of nudism in Germany and that several pioneering books, such as Heinrich Pudor’s *Cult of the Nude* and Richard Ungewitter’s *Nakedness*, had been published in the 1890s, Surén (Figure 1) was one of the most popular promoters of German *Nacktkultur* (nudism) in the 1920s.<sup>13</sup> The founder of a well-known gymnastic system, he published widely on the benefits of physical exercise and exposure of the naked body to air and sunlight for both men and women.<sup>14</sup> First published in German in February 1924, *Der Mensch und die Sonne*<sup>15</sup> ran through 68 impressions (250,000 copies) in its first year of publication and continued in print until the end of World War Two.<sup>16</sup> When translated into English the book was also a best seller in Britain (and across Europe) receiving support from eminent Dr Caleb Williams Saleeby (dress reformer, Chairman of the National Birth-rate Commission, 1918-20, and Chairman of the Sunlight League f.1924),<sup>17</sup> and the influential Dr William Ralph Inge (then Dean of St Paul’s).<sup>18</sup> Third, it is possible to draw a series of parallels between Surén’s ideology (e.g. his views on perception and human-nature relationships) and wider theoretical debates that were beginning to circulate in this period, particularly those inspired by phenomenology. As a

result, a study of his work contributes not only to the cultural-historical geography of outdoor pursuits, but might also compliment more recent work in geography on post-phenomenological theory<sup>19</sup> and theories of affect.<sup>20</sup> Finally, and as demonstrated rather flamboyantly by the quote above, the book is worthy of specific attention because of Surén's style of writing. Although the text occasionally borders on the evangelistic, it is a book that displays very effectively the rich sensory narratives which prevailed in the naturist genre at this time.

**Figure 1:** Hans Surén. Source: H.Surén, *Man and Sunlight*. Translated by D.A.Jones (Slough, Sollux, 1927) p.163.

The paper is in four sections. First, I focus on Surén's critique of traditional scientific methods and, in particular, his appraisal of contemporary medical practice which, he argued, was based on disembodied calculation and a partial understanding of human experience. Only when the medical profession embraced a more 'holistic' attitude towards the body would they begin to appreciate the full effect of sunlight and fresh air on human health. The second section considers the health-giving properties of these and other

‘natural influences’ in more depth paying particular attention to benefits that might be derived from the unpredictable British climate, and the ways in which Surén and fellow naturists described their experiences of being naked in nature. For Surén, the skin was a porous boundary between the internal and external forces of nature and only when an individual became attuned to both would they experience harmony in mind, body, and spirit.<sup>21</sup> The third section considers naturism’s paradoxical position within the climate of reform in 1920s Europe and explores Surén’s approach to, and justification of, public nudity. Finally, I look more closely at Surén’s conception of the harmonious body, his idealisation of an able-bodied, youthful physique, and the extent to which his discourse might challenge traditional notions of the male and female body. Before I begin, however, it is necessary to consider the socio-historical context within which *Man and Sunlight* was written and published. In so doing, I document Surén’s reaction to the contemporary milieu and highlight some of the connections that can be made between his doctrine and the ideas of contemporary humanist philosophers. I also outline the ways in which the fears expressed by Surén in *Man and Sunlight* would have resonated with debates on nationhood and health then circulating in Britain.

#### *Critiquing the contemporary milieu*

Written during the turbulent years of the Weimar Republic (1919-1933), *Man and Sunlight* is undoubtedly a reflection of Surén’s views on the prevailing economic and socio-cultural context. The years prior to 1924, for example, were a time of intense political wrangling and widespread economic depression within Germany. The Treaty of Versailles had taken away rights to territory, colonial possessions and raw materials, and the French occupation of the Ruhr region was the final straw for an economy gripped by catastrophic inflation.<sup>22</sup> Wider intellectual shifts also occurred during this period as demonstrated in the work of German philosophers Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976).<sup>23</sup>

Husserlian phenomenology critiqued Western positivistic scientific attitude (or ‘natural attitude’) and the dualism of subject and object. Providing a ‘descriptive philosophy of experience’, phenomenology was a metaphysical project designed to disclose the world as it showed itself before scientific enquiry.<sup>24</sup> Phenomenological approaches ‘stress[ed] direct, bodily contact with, and experience of, landscape’ and aimed ‘to reveal how senses of self and landscape are together made and communicated, in and through lived experience’.<sup>25</sup> Both Husserl and Heidegger identified a crisis in European society although it was the latter who provided the most powerful critique of Western modernity, his main concern being that European culture was suffering from the dislocation of a ‘rationalistic’, ‘modernising’ and ‘nihilistic bourgeois *zivilisation*’ and was condemned therefore to perpetual spiritual decline.<sup>26</sup>

Surén stated that *Man and Sunlight* arose from his desire to call attention to the fundamental facts of national existence and development, and in this respect one might argue that he shared Heidegger’s iconoclastic outlook. Surén believed that decay in the strength of the individual body, regardless of the highest achievements of the spirit or most profound scientific knowledge, would eventually lead to national decline and death. Intrinsic to this theory was his belief in the effects that different physical and social environments could have upon the human body. Surén was particularly concerned with the extent to which twentieth-century civilisation had become synonymous with the urban and, throughout *Man and Sunlight*, he promoted a moral geography of landscape in which the contemporary city was considered to be an unsuitable environment for humans; ‘like slaves, they totter under the heavy fetters of drudgery for their daily bread, far from sunlight, far from Nature (sic) in the dungeons of the town’.<sup>27</sup> Surén believed that city life restricted the variety of human experience and he lamented that the modern-day urban population was tied not only by the ‘merciless conventions’ of a ‘short-sighted and pernicious morality’ and ‘morbid



prudery' (which I discuss later), but also by a dulling of the senses similar to the 'neurasthenia' or 'blasé attitude' witnessed by German sociologist Georg Simmel (1858-1918).<sup>28</sup> According to Simmel, the blasé attitude was a metropolitan phenomenon which resulted from the 'rapidly changing and closely compressed contrasting stimulations of the nerves' experienced by city dwellers.<sup>29</sup> He believed that prolonged exposure to the urban milieu agitated the metropolitan body's nerves to their strongest reactivity for such a long time that eventually they ceased to react at all rendering the body incapable of reacting to new sensations with the 'appropriate' energy.<sup>30</sup>

There are many parallels between the philosophies of Simmel and Surén and I highlight their shared views on intellectualism later in the paper, however, it is their common perspective on the social meaning of money and the qualitative values of things which offers the greatest insight into Surén's naturist theory. Surén asserted that as soon as humans became strangers to sunlight and nature, both health and strength of character vanished. He stated,

[w]ith fiendish glee civilisation has thrown us a few scraps at which we eagerly grasped (sic) so that in their glitter we might imagine ourselves lords of creation. From time immemorial the curse of money has been to estrange us from contentment and natural simplicity'.<sup>31</sup>

In his *magnum opus* *The Philosophy of Money* (1907), Simmel acknowledged that money could create a strong bond amongst members of an economic circle, enhance independence and autonomy for individuals, and that ultimately, it was responsible for establishing more connections among people than had ever previously existed.<sup>32</sup> Yet, he was also conscious of what he saw as the 'alienating' and 'separating' effect of monetary transactions and the dangers of money as an impersonal, objectified measure of value. According to Simmel, the

continual estimation of financial 'value' that was required by the monetary economy had gradually established this as the only valid means of judging 'worth' or 'effectiveness'.<sup>33</sup> As a result, the qualitative values of things were being progressively obscured by wholly quantitative ones.<sup>34</sup> In addition, although Simmel recognised that money could be linked with social phenomena such as exchange, ownership, and individual freedom, like Surén he felt that money also radiated out into some of the less desirable character traits of modern life and it could just as easily engender greed, extravagance, and cynicism.<sup>35</sup> According to Simmel, money moved the 'complete satisfaction of an individual's wishes into a much greater and more tempting proximity [and offered the] possibility of obtaining, at a single stroke [...] whatever [appeared] at all desirable'.<sup>36</sup> For both men, money tempted a certain laxity and thoughtlessness of action, and a desire for easily obtainable status and material wealth which discouraged individuals from discovering and valuing the natural rewards brought about by hard work and self-discipline.

Given the present condition of contemporary society, Surén advocated that radical changes in both its outlook and organisation must be made in order to restore moral order and to facilitate the development or re-discovery of the 'naturally healthy' body. In this respect Surén's arguments reflect not only the social and intellectual climate in Germany but also broader debates circulating within Europe at this time, particularly in Britain, France, and Italy. The most salient of which include, the connections made between industrialism and physical/moral degeneracy,<sup>37</sup> the amelioration of current urban conditions and preventative action through improved welfare, social planning and architectural design,<sup>38</sup> the perceived need for physical fitness and self-improvement,<sup>39</sup> and the preservation of rural values.<sup>40</sup> In Britain, concerns over the deterioration of the 'national stock' and the fragility of the Empire were running particularly high following the shocking revelation of the poor physical condition of volunteers during the recruitment campaigns of the Boer War and

World War One.<sup>41</sup> The main premise of *Man and Sunlight* would have struck a chord in the hearts of many British social reformers and their European counterparts, some of whom were already beginning to explore the health benefits to be gained through increased exposure to sunlight and fresh air.<sup>42</sup> In his 'Foreword' to *Man and Sunlight*, for example, Saleeby (who had published on the benefits of sunlight in the *New Statesman* under the pseudonym 'Lens' as early as 1921) remarked that eighty per cent of the British population inhabited crowded cities, in which atmospheric pollution excluded about eighty per cent of the ultra-violet constituents of the sunlight.<sup>43</sup> As far as he was concerned, civilisation had effectively 'descended into darkness'.

What is interesting about the discourse of both Simmel and Surén, however, and perhaps what distinguishes their ideas from those of Heidegger, is their belief in the redemptive properties of nature, that it was possible to escape the passive, desensitized, and ultimately degenerative existence endured by the 'metropolitan body'. As sociologist Lewis notes, they believed that 'there could be found aspects of life (or more precisely leisure) that could elude the grasp of modern consumer capitalism'.<sup>44</sup> Whilst Simmel found freedom and adventure in mountain climbing, Surén and his contemporaries found these qualities encapsulated in the sensory and embodied experience of naturism. Surén promoted *Man and Sunlight* as an antidote for a misguided civilisation. In addition to making one feel (and look) physically fit and radiant, he advocated that exposing the body to the natural environment would also improve one's character, spiritually and morally. To be naked in nature was an educational experience, important not only to personal development but to the development of society. As a result of spending more time in close contact with nature, individuals would become attuned to their instinctive bodily rhythms and would be better equipped to form a more cohesive and less decadent and corrupt society.

## Science and intellectualism

A strong current which runs throughout *Man and Sunlight* is Surén's critique of traditional scientific methods (which he dismissed as partial and overly concerned with quantifiable indicators) and his desire for a greater understanding of the qualitative benefits of sunlight and fresh air. Both Surén and Simmel highlighted disembodied academic 'intellectualism' as particularly deleterious to human development.<sup>45</sup> Medical science drew particularly scathing criticism and of it Surén said: '[d]o not listen simply and solely to the scholarship of the present day—there are but few wise men among its servants—to many it is but a means of livelihood'.<sup>46</sup> According to Surén, abstract thought constrained the individual, it overshadowed the 'free impulses' of 'the heart, the conscience, and understanding'.<sup>47</sup> His critique was not unusual. During the Weimar Republic the status and function of intellectuals was often called into question. Kaes *et al* note that 'no longer able to play the role of state-supported mandarins, yet still often arrogating to themselves the role of universal spokesmen, many intellectuals sought to redefine their position in radically new ways'.<sup>48</sup> Whilst philosophers such as Hannah Arendt felt that the role of the intellectual was to transcend their social situation and think about ultimate questions rather than to merely synthesize socially determined points of view, her high opinion of the intellectual was not universally shared. In certain quarters, 'the very word intellectual became an unequivocal term of opprobrium'.<sup>49</sup> Surén warned against the abstraction of science and what he felt was a partial understanding of human experience. Cultivated to the 'point of morbidity', with the 'dismal burden' of austere mental science: '[t]he mind may be cultivated to the finest pitch, yet on its cold heights, the soul, devoid of light, shudders into loneliness'.<sup>50</sup>

In treating the body as incidental to the cultivation of intellect, science marginalised and effectively annulled the material concerns of human experience such as emotion, sensuality, and belonging. In response, Surén set out deliberately to emphasise the connections

between mind and body, arguing *against* the dichotomy of traditional enlightenment thought to construct a much more embodied, sensorially aware, and ‘recursively constituted’ conception of the mind-body relationship.<sup>51</sup> Commenting on the ‘absurd scientific opinion’ that a deep tan was not worth striving for (a view which opposed that of the Ancient Greeks whom he greatly admired), Surén scornfully remarked that most medical research on the influence of environments upon the body relied heavily on inaccurate and inappropriate measuring apparatus. Though gaining much knowledge of the internal processes and interdependence of the body, this research did,

not sufficiently [recognise] the influence of our surroundings on the body; of the atmospheric vibrations—yes, the metaphysical forces associated with us. These influences are very great, although their action is slow and cannot yet be established and measured by means of instruments.<sup>52</sup>

Surén’s desire to highlight the shortcomings of modern science shares many parallels with contemporary phenomenological thought. For example, through phenomenology Husserl believed that it was possible to render that which was indeterminate and often invisible (e.g. the qualitative values of things) ‘determinate’, as a phenomenon in its own right and worthy of attention. Writing slightly later, Maurice Merleau-Ponty stressed that our lived bodies *could not* be disregarded, ‘[t]o do so would be to ‘forget’ the world of concrete existence, and enter instead a secondary realm of theoretical reflection and abstraction’.<sup>53</sup> Surén recognised that sensory perception, emotion, and everyday attachments were integral to the ways in which humans encountered, understood and evaluated their experiences of space and place. He argued that sensory, embodied (and sometimes fleeting) phenomena should not be ignored or devalued simply because they could not be measured by contemporary scientific methods.

Throughout *Man and Sunlight* Surén's discourse suggests that humans must develop both mind and body in order to become more aware of their whole being and he felt it necessary to move away from the traditional emphasis on medical 'observation', toward a more holistic interpretation of the therapeutic value of nature. It must be acknowledged, however, that like the work of Husserl, *Man and Sunlight* was not completely disengaged from contemporary scientific debates, a strategic move which was not lost on British critics. One book review stated '[Surén] is obviously sincere, and from his photograph a very earnest looking man [though his] cult is an old one and typically of this age, it reappears under the auspices of science'.<sup>54</sup> Surén documented the advances of Swiss doctors Bernhard and Rollier and the work of their predecessors Rikli, Downes and Blunt, and Finsen lamenting that their opinions had been slow to gain recognition. Finsen, whom Surén called a 'pioneer in the practice of modern sun-worship', attempted to cure Lupus (a form of cutaneous Tuberculosis (TB)) by means of light. Undoubtedly working with a knowledge of Koch's work on the anthrax bacillus, he worked first with concentrated sunlight and then with artificial light and obtained results far superior to those of surgical treatment his research earning him the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1903.<sup>55</sup> Bernhard of St Moriz was credited as the first *modern* surgeon to apply 'heliotherapy' (or 'sunbaths') in the treatment of surgical complaints such as TB in 1902.<sup>56</sup> The effects of solar radiation on the body did not, however, become a European-wide concern until the late 1920s and as such, Surén's work can be viewed as pioneering in bringing these ideas to a mass, international audience. Surén, like fellow naturist author Parmelee, also commented favourably upon research that had been conducted into methods of generating artificial sunlight (e.g. quartz, mercury, and 'carbon arc' lamps) which had proved to have splendid curative results improving patients' powers of endurance and athletic capacity.<sup>57</sup> Yet, these methods could

only ever be substitutes and Surén, like his supporter Saleeby, believed that at the present time there was an urgent need to find more-simple, natural means to health and fitness.

Surén and his contemporaries believed that sunlight had a chemical action on the organs and that the skin, like the lungs, was an organ for cleansing the blood. Although medical opinion regarding the effectiveness of sunlight in the treatment of specific ailments was divided, Surén referred his readers to the work of Professor Bier and his use of sunbaths in the treatment of TB at the Hohenlychen Sanatorium, Germany. Bier and his supporters considered sun and air baths to be equivalent to 'naked exercise' which formed the muscles and visibly beautified the body. After a period of 'correct bathing', the individual was said to experience natural tiredness, supreme physical well-being, be in cheerful spirits, and gain healthy sleep.<sup>58</sup> The benefits sun and air bathing also manifest themselves directly on the skin.<sup>59</sup> As soon as one removed one's clothes it was possible to witness nature acting upon oneself: properly aired and lighted the skin became a velvety, supple, copper-coloured tissue, immune from spots and blemishes and its hairs usually showed considerable development.<sup>60</sup> It was, however, possible to overdo it. In 1929 *The Times* stated that the 'happy holiday-maker, cultivating the sunburn now so fashionable for trunk as well as limbs, may easily take an ultra-violet overdose'.<sup>61</sup> In a similar way to athletic exercise the inexperienced enthusiast (either following medical advice or fashionistas such as Coco Chanel) often embraced sun-bathing with an ardour which led to disappointment and disaster.<sup>62</sup> It was a mistake to suppose that intense, prolonged and regular sunbaths were a necessity and most advocates, including Surén, stipulated that excessive exposure *was* dangerous unless precautions were taken.<sup>63</sup> The symptoms of over-exposure ranged from the acute (e.g. reddening of the skin, sun-stroke, severe blistering, and inflammation) to the more equivocal (e.g. fatigue, listlessness, irritability, malaise, nausea, headache, faintness, pyrexia, loss of appetite, and biliousness).<sup>64</sup> To assuage such dangers, proponents

recommended that exposure be gradually increased both in duration and in the amount of skin surface revealed, particularly in the initial stages.<sup>65</sup> The body should never be too hot or too cold, the skin should not be allowed to blister nor should one shiver and the head should be protected from fierce sunlight.

The above suggests that, in popular culture, a 'tan' was considered not only to be the height of fashion, but also, the ultimate expression of physical health and mental well-being. Yet, a close reading of *Man and Sunlight* and other naturist literature from the same period shows that an embodied relationship with nature was more than skin deep.

### **Sense and sensibility**

The health-giving benefits of sunlight and fresh air were rapidly accepted in Britain from the late 1920s onwards and the institutionalisation of these ideas can be seen in the development of sun-bathing facilities for inner-city children<sup>66</sup> and the proliferation of open-air schools in this period.<sup>67</sup> Up until the mid-1930s it was widely believed that the health-giving qualities of holiday seasons were best measured in terms of sunlight.<sup>68</sup> This view required modification, however, in the light of growing empirical evidence which suggested that a climate with distinct seasonal changes was perhaps better suited to making the body hardy, resistant to disease and corruption, and to acquire physical and mental health.<sup>69</sup> Increasing emphasis began to be placed on 'variety' and the advantages to be derived from sharp 'bracing' encounters with nature. For example, one open-air school in Salford showed that despite a lack of UV rays in winter a life spent wholly in the open air, even with minimal skin exposure, was enough to cure rickets and make children robust.<sup>70</sup> It was also discovered that relatively cold and wet summers were often characterised by a high degree of physical fitness and were followed by winters in which morbidity rates and mortality were low. Despite the titular emphasis of the book, Surén believed that every



opportunity should be taken to enjoy the sensation of light and air on the naked body, and he showed great pride in his complete indifference to adverse weather conditions. Describing his experiences of naked cross-country running, for example, he enthused;

the sensation of virile and primitive manhood becomes even stronger if one achieves the will and the fortitude to expose one's body to storm and wild weather. [There is an] unspeakable feeling of well-being and unimagined joy of living animate the body in rain and strong wind.<sup>71</sup>

[i]t was our aim to harden ourselves by [running] in all weathers as often as at all possible. [...] over and under—often through boggy ground where the earth shook around us and soft mud and water squelched between the toes. We had no fear and went hullooing over everything that came in our way; our motto was 'Through'!<sup>72</sup>

For Surén, seasonal illness was not the result of a 'cold spell' but rather an 'entirely wrong upbringing and mode of life'. Although he acknowledged, in passing, that different bodies had different capacities for being affected<sup>73</sup> and that a 'prolonged rain bath [might have] an exciting effect on the brain, spine and nerves of those of nervous disposition'.<sup>74</sup> Most people could safely expose their body in winter and rain was, in general, 'most salutary, a tonic and a joy to the healthy'.<sup>75</sup>

Surén celebrated the refreshing vitality of the natural world and described how 'inexpressible' longings drove him 'to hurl [himself] in wet weather prone on the earth, naked in soft, muddy ground'.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, many of the experiences that he found personally pleasurable were incorporated into his courses; see, for example, the 'Sporting Mud Bath' (Figure 2).<sup>77</sup> Surén's desire to immerse himself in nature is reminiscent of that expressed by nineteenth century American naturalist and 'simple life' advocate Henry Thoreau.<sup>78</sup> Like Surén, Thoreau actively sought out sensuous experiences; nature was 'a living thing, like

himself, which he want[ed] to respond to with his whole being, not just with the sense of sight but with the other senses as well'.<sup>79</sup> Both men viewed going naked in nature as a form of education which could develop an individual's 'natural' capacity for perception. For example, Thoreau disciplined himself to sense all that he could and was proud of his ability to witness sights that companions could not, distinguish between (and anticipate) slight sounds, smell the scent trails left by animals, enjoy simple foods and, detect tiny changes in air temperature.<sup>80</sup> Whilst Surén commented that his powers of observation, instinct for nature and capacities for insight had all been marvellously increased since first shedding his clothes and that, when naked, his self-awareness and senses of touch, smell, hearing and taste became inflamed. When roving naked in the natural environment he stated that one could feel the breathing of nature; 'every tree and every shrub whisper deep slumbering wisdom into our souls [it] awakens in us the deep intuitive knowledge of true humanity and all of the transitoryness of our school learning'.<sup>81</sup> For both Surén and Thoreau such close encounters with nature symbolised 'the antithesis of culture' and promised to 'provide Westerners weary of the sophistry of civilisation with what seem[ed] like a welcome retreat into untutored sensation'.<sup>82</sup> Howes notes, however, that the human sensorium 'never exists in a natural state [humans] are social beings, and just as human nature itself is a product of culture, so is the human sensorium'.<sup>83</sup> Surén's longing for an unadulterated, intimate relationship with nature was fuelled not only by his contempt for contemporary society and modern scientific approaches, but also, as I document in the next section, by an idealisation of the 'primitive'.

Surén believed that in order to benefit from the forces of nature one must consciously situate oneself within the natural environment and be willing to have a potentially unmediated relationship with it.<sup>84</sup> For him, being naked in nature was an elemental experience; by 'inwardly surrendering' to the external and internal flows and rhythms of

nature, he felt it was possible to achieve an ‘inexhaustible strength’, ‘wondrous learning’ and peace in the soul. The feet (the ‘root’ of, or gateway to, the body) provided a particularly direct point of connection with nature for Surén; he stated, ‘[i]f only men knew what sheer pleasure it means to go barefoot through the grass, and how strengthening it is to wander in sand heated by the sun’.<sup>85</sup> Although, the feet were not the only tactile part of the body to *feel* the environment; the skin did also, exposed as it was to the prevailing weather conditions.<sup>86</sup> For Surén, ‘the skin with its countless terminals and blood vessels and nerves [was] man’s connection with the outer world, from which all of us, for the most part unconsciously, draw part of our power’.<sup>87</sup> In this senses, his sensory narrative challenges traditional notions of the ‘perceiving subject’ and the ‘perceived world’<sup>88</sup> and mirrors Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of landscape as ‘an up-close, intimate and proximate material milieu of engagement and practice’ as opposed to ‘a distant object or spectacle to be visually surveyed’.<sup>89</sup> However, this was not a one-way relationship. As in recent theorisations of affect, for Surén ‘being affected-affecting’ are ‘two sides of the same dynamic shift, or change, in the body’<sup>90</sup>; when one affected something at the same time one opened oneself up to being affected in turn.<sup>91</sup> As they ran cross-country Surén and his students enjoyed a reciprocal haptic relationship with the natural environment; their bodies touched and were touched.<sup>92</sup> The skin was porous boundary and nudity enabled the forces of nature to stream into the body through the pores and orifices as the one moved through space.

Such exquisite sensibility was not unusual in naturist texts published in this period. For example, whilst describing the pleasures of drying off without a bathing suit, naturist author Parmelee was similarly enthusiastic;

I climbed on top of the dune and lay down upon the soft warm sand, which yielded hospitably to my body. A gentle breeze played over every portion of my skin, agreeably cooling and

exhilarating it. No artificial covering separated me from the earth and air, wind and sun. Never had I felt so completely part of nature.<sup>93</sup>

**Figure 2:** Surèn's 'Sporting Mudbath'. Source: H.Surèn, *Man and Sunlight*. Translated by D.A.Jones (Slough, Sollux, 1927) p.187.

Even as late as 1966 when naturist magazines were beginning to focus less and less on the health giving properties of nature in favour of more socially-oriented topics (e.g. the activities of local clubs, legalities, child protection, naturist sporting events, etc.), a correspondent to *British Naturism* wrote that when he shed his clothes in Spring he got a sense of,

almost primeval excitement that the world was new again [we] are more closely joined with the rebirth with which Nature (sic) fills all her creatures at this time [the] senses react to every sound and smell about them [the] body quickens to the warmth of the sun, the balmy air [...] soothes away the tiredness of winter.<sup>94</sup>

As Matless has acknowledged, however, such rapturous description of the sensory pleasures experienced when naked meant that naturists were subject to contemporary accusations of hedonism and decadence, particularly from those striving to preserve countryside ‘values’ and moral probity.<sup>95</sup> Despite the best efforts of Surén and other like-minded individuals who went to great lengths to stress the modest and prudent manner in which naturists conducted their affairs, naturism was (and remains) an easy target for ‘nudge and wink satire’ and taunts of eccentricity.<sup>96</sup> As Howes notes, in the West we are accustomed to associate sensuality with sexuality and, for many ‘the expression “sensual revolution” may automatically evoke the notion of a “sexual revolution” (rather than the encompassing interaction with the social and material world)’.<sup>97</sup> I discuss the ways in which Surén dealt with the moral complexities of social nudity in the next section, however, I would argue that failure to take seriously the sensuous dimension of naturist experience in both popular and academic texts, is to ignore a fundamental aspect of this pursuit. Indeed, it is in this fascination with the body and sensory perception that *Man and Sunlight*, and many other early twentieth century naturist-texts, provide a valuable case study for embodied-sensuous theory.

### **Nudity and morality**

The ‘emergence of Western naturist movements in the early twentieth century [can] be located within a broader cluster of cultural re-orientations towards nature’.<sup>98</sup> *Man and Sunlight* was published in Britain in a period when the expansion of leisure and recreation in the natural environment was being welcomed as an opportunity for the culture of citizenship, and celebrated as a powerful antidote to the harmful impact urban life was perceived to have on the human body.<sup>99</sup> Particular emphasis was placed on personal development through outdoor pursuits and on the *latent* citizenship of the individual, whilst the natural environment was constructed as the primary locus within which to

nurture mentally alert, physically fit and spiritually whole citizens. Paradoxically, although naturism was a healthy outdoor pursuit ideologically presumed to generate strength of character and physical fitness alongside an appreciation of the natural environment, it was (and still is) considered by many to be a fairly eccentric or comical activity, which transgressed many moral sensibilities, and effectively made naturists ‘anti-citizens’.<sup>100</sup> As Lewinski, Bell and Holiday, and Cover all note, representations of nakedness in Western culture have long been inseparable from sex and sexuality, and in both Germany and Britain the term ‘nude’ has always had troublesome and immoral connotations.<sup>101</sup> Whilst Worpole argues that there is good reason to believe that the book ‘was well-intentioned rather than prurient, given that it was published in the UK by a company which manufactured sun-ray lamps, Sollux Ltd’.<sup>102</sup> Contemporary attitudes regarding the moral dissipation which might result from viewing the copious nude images of men, women, and children are clearly manifest within the English translation of *Man and Sunlight*, and the book provides an excellent (if complex) example of the prevailing British publication policy. In this period it was common for images of naked men and women to go through a de-sexing process which involved masking out bodily features such as pubic hair and nipples on the photographic print.<sup>103</sup> Whilst many of the men wear ‘athletic slips’ (the pattern for which was provided at the back of the book) some do appear to have had ‘trunks’ blacked-in if their poses were too explicit, yet the women’s breasts, nipples and under-arm hair are clearly visible and no attempt has been made to conceal any part of the children’s naked bodies.

For Surén and his fellow naturists, only total nudity could afford the maximum possible exposure of the body to the health giving properties of the prevailing climate by allowing direct and total contact with one’s immediate environment. He stated;

Clean, fine humanity thrills us like a holy thing when the warm sun kisses our naked limbs—when glad sunlight kindles the soul to wonder. In the web of verdant Nature (sic), in the swirl of storm, in the waft of summer breezes, in the witchery of exquisite sunshine, the loftiest ideals appear near and attainable.<sup>104</sup>

Even products such as sun-creams (which were increasingly popular from the mid-1930s onwards in Britain) were problematic. Convinced that people used soap excessively depriving the skin of natural oils, Surén advocated dressing the skin lightly with vegetable oils. Whilst it is not explicit *why* Surén disapproved of ‘artificial’ body dressings, a consideration of his views on the relationship between humans and nature suggests he felt that such products may have created a barrier between the two. For example, by adding an ‘unnatural’ layer to the skin (the ‘interface’<sup>105</sup> between oneself and the environment), the body would have been prevented from experiencing the full sensation of the elements and, in turn, the environment would have been prevented from acting upon the body to maximum effect. Instead he recommended that his readers ‘surrendered’ themselves to the simple ‘joy of nakedness’;

When early morning boarders the distant summer cloudlets with gold, and the larks exalt over field and meadow; when all that rejoices in the name of man is slumbering, then hasten forth; throw off the mundane, the care and trouble within [...]. Doff your garments; rove and run in free and healthy nakedness. So true manhood reveals itself. How wondrously the cool morning breeze caresses the naked limbs, and how every sense moves with the divine melody of the Lark’s song.<sup>106</sup>

As long as people remained remote from, unable to see and experience, their bodies they would not know health, strength and beauty.<sup>107</sup> Nakedness in nature was a deeply meaningful experience and clothes and artificial products inhibited its finest influences.

Recognising the stigma associated with nudity and acknowledging that it was easier for people to follow tradition rather than to challenge it, Surén reassured the reader that they should not be alarmed when the ‘common herd’ talked of ‘fanaticism’ to the delight of those who only knew the ‘cult of clothing’. He spoke of the ignorance of the public when it came to the most ‘elementary relations’ of their body to nature and declared, ‘we must struggle through to recognition of the fact that we have means of wonderful invigoration in the forces of Nature (sic), unfortunately still so little known’.<sup>108</sup> In contemporary society he noted, people were quick to ‘don the pleasant cloak of virtue and loudly denounce foul depravity’.<sup>109</sup> Yet, despite his bluff attitude and refusal to discuss the issue explicitly, it is clear that the popular juxtaposition of nudity and sex concerned Surén greatly. These concerns manifest themselves in two clear ways. First, Surén appeared to be acutely aware that any misinterpretation of, or confusion over, the book’s purpose might attract negative press for his ideas and, as a result, he contrived to write almost the whole book as though the body was a ‘completely asexual object’.<sup>110</sup> He stressed that one must never try to force the sight of one’s naked body on others and, although naked bathing was not illegal in Germany and was *tolerated* to some extent on British beaches, he advised his readers to be cautious and recommended that all mixed bathing spaces should, as a fundamental and absolute principle, be kept free of alcoholic drink. Although he stated that ‘the finest medicines—sunlight, air and water—should not be contaminated with this poison!’ it is important to recognise the hidden connotation that over-indulgence may lead to lascivious behaviour.<sup>111</sup> Second, it is clear that the act of sex itself posed a particular problem for Surén. Whilst he acknowledged that sexual activity was necessary for the advancement of the human race and admitted that irradiation of the genitals had a great effect in increasing strength, health and the joy of life, he tried to pre-empt the moral judgements that might be made by those outside the movement. For example, he cautioned that ‘sexual power is [...]



not signified by its physical expression alone; its sublimation and transference to the plane of mind and spirit is of supreme importance'.<sup>112</sup> Central to nudism was athletic development and the enhancement of physical strength through exposure to the sun with a sublimation of libidinal energy to the collectivity and camaraderie shown in Figure 2.<sup>113</sup> *Man and Sunlight* provided a response to negative assertions claiming that naturism not only provided a form of 'enlightenment', redemption' and 'escape' from the 'imprisoning' confines and spiritual 'darkness' of urban areas, but also from the contemporary regime and traditions of non-naked cultures.

Surén argued persuasively for the 'nobility of nakedness' and linked the 'natural' nudity of the 'primitive peoples' (sic) he had witnessed on his travels to a common heritage in the West (i.e. Ancient Greek civilisation) in which the 'naked body was very generally encountered, and accounted most natural'.<sup>114</sup> He described the permanently clothed skin of Northerners' as 'sickly pale' and 'unclean' and boasted, '[a]s regards healthy brown skin, I could vie with any Moor or Arab'.<sup>115</sup> In this respect, the tanned bodies in *Man and Sunlight* stand in stark contrast to other images from around the same period in which athletes were often depicted as pieces of sculpture. Their sense of cool detachment was often reinforced by applying a coating of talcum powder to the body making the skin seem pale and stone-like.<sup>116</sup> Although Surén states categorically that his models were not made up with brown colour to be photographed, a popular technique during this period involved burnt cork being applied to the body in order to emphasise muscle tone.<sup>117</sup> It is unclear how Surén's views on tanning, and his elevation of darker skin tones to a position of healthy desirability, fitted into the Aryan discourses which were beginning to circulate in Germany around this time. One can clearly see a primitivism in *Man and Sunlight* which challenged the racial dialogues which had been circulating in Europe (as a result of colonial expansion) since the eighteenth century. In contemporary discourse the word 'primitive' generally referred to

‘someone or something less complex, or less advanced, than the person or thing to which it [was] being compared [and was] conventionally defined in negative terms’.<sup>118</sup> Primitivists such as Surén, however, questioned the validity of these assumptions and celebrated the qualities of ‘less-developed’ (or chronologically early cultures) as superior to those of contemporary, more technologically advanced civilizations, because they were perceived to exist in a state which was closer to nature-the ‘ideal’ state. For them, ‘the primitive’ held what Torgovnick describes as ‘an important key to alternative social directions; it could recoup for the West possibilities obliterated by the course of history’.<sup>119</sup> This was ‘primitivism’ in its narrowest sense, whereby ‘spatial distance [was] conflated with temporal distance’ so that contemporary non-Western societies appeared as present visages of the German (and, in translation, British) peoples’ own pasts.<sup>120</sup> Implicit within this world view, was a subscription to ‘a Eurocentric narrative in which human cultures [were] measured and known according to their place along the particular developmental path prescribed by the history of Europe’.<sup>121</sup>

Some of the best examples of primitivism in this period can be found in the art world where painters such as Gauguin, and later Picasso, engaged in a joyous celebration of ‘the primitive’. These artworks tended to express a sensibility which informed a wide range of cultural phenomena (e.g. literature, music) during the early twentieth century rather than constitute an aesthetic ‘movement’, however, a series of commonalities can be identified. These include: a desire to escape European conventions and express the ‘primal’ impulses within the human body; a celebration of the ‘unconscious’; a tendency towards abstraction; and, a use of geometric designs inspired by ‘non-Western’ art forms. As Rhodes notes, however, that the ‘very act of appealing to the primitive [involved] an implicit acceptance of conventional beliefs, albeit voiced in positive terms, as something to be envied or

respected'.<sup>122</sup> Herein, Rhodes emphasizes a profoundly equivocal issue that lies at the heart of primitivist ideology;

[that] although protagonists might entreat the primitive as support and justification for projected cultural and social change, this alteration [was] always expected to come from within the West—there [was] never any question of the wholesale replacement of the aspects of culture to which the Primitivist [was] objecting with the primitive itself.<sup>123</sup>

Surén's work demonstrates a similarly ambiguous reasoning. Whilst he was keen to encourage contemporary populations to re-discover their essential being or 'a lost awareness of the body'<sup>124</sup> he did not suggest that they regress so far back to nature as to become associated with barbarism or savagery. In his words; '[c]ertainly we cannot again live the life of the natural savage—that would mean a great retrogression in our development; yet we must once again win for ourselves the health and strength of these peoples of the past'.<sup>125</sup> Surén was not the only naturalist author to distinguish between the civilised and the savage in this way; such sentiments are also evident in Parmelee's *Nudity in Modern Life*.<sup>126</sup> Surén did, however, have particular ideas as to which sections of Western society might be responsible for leading the way towards 'sunlight-humanity'.

### **Vitality and youth**

Following a trend which gained widespread popularity across Europe and America around this period,<sup>127</sup> Surén was fascinated by the classical body of Ancient Greece and his efforts to retrieve this 'lost' physicality (as depicted by classical sculpture) resonate throughout *Man and Sunlight*.<sup>128</sup> He stated, '[t]he beauty of antiquity [embraced] a strength befitting the years, endurance, dexterity, swiftness, and iron hardihood, together with a healthy mind'.<sup>129</sup> In apparent sympathy with the aggressive spirituality and physical prowess of late nineteenth

century ‘muscular Christianity’ it was, he declared, one’s sacred duty to discipline one’s body by daily gymnastic exercise; no-one should suppose they had no time or were too weak.<sup>130</sup> According to Surén, the desire for all should be a healthy, vigorous beauty which would take one on to advanced age, and give one such strength and elegance as to inspire the artist. One must be cautious however, the ill-advised often ‘groped blindly’ or ‘plunged headlong’ down the wrong path, and whilst ambition ‘as the inducement to good performance’, was a good spur, it nearly always led astray. Surén commented, ‘youths joining the sports clubs may well be keen to find strength and beauty, but often find only the spirit of “record-snatching” and selfish specialisation’.<sup>131</sup> Preferably, one’s ‘ambition must be directed more toward [...] all-round strength, to the strenuous overcoming of all natural deficiencies—to fitness of character and inward nobility’.<sup>132</sup> Of course, Surén’s idealisation of the classical (and as suggested by this last quote, ‘able-bodied’) physique, and his evangelistic zeal for racial improvement, was strongly echoed in later years by the right-wing nationalism of Hitler’s Germany.<sup>133</sup> Surén was a member of the Nazi party and post-1933, altered and re-titled subsequent editions of the book to accommodate Nazi ideology.<sup>134</sup> Yet, in his preface to *Man and Sunlight*, he seemed particularly conscious of the message he portrayed to British audiences, stating that his name was already being used as propaganda for movements ‘entirely alien to [his] own spirit’.<sup>135</sup> It is not my intention here to debate Surén’s Nazi connections.<sup>136</sup> There is no doubt, however, that the prestige granted to expressions of German nationalist body culture under National Socialism proved attractive to many advocates of the reform and body culture movements.<sup>137</sup>

Perhaps mindful of the scepticism and negative publicity which his ideas might attract, Surén advocated that the public must be slowly guided towards the idea of nakedness in sport, and educated to delight in the beautiful naked physique.

**Figure 3:** Models of sunlight physique. Source: H.Surén, *Man and Sunlight*. Translated by D.A.Jones (Slough, Sollux, 1927) p.185.

He felt that spectators should be encouraged to reserve their admiration not for individual performances, but for the naked body harmoniously and thoroughly trained. Once this was commonplace, Surén was convinced that the body, noble in its nakedness, would incite individuals to emulate the strong brown bodies of the athletes, poised like statues ‘in bronze’. Included in *Man and Sunlight* are a variety of photographs (from sources too numerous to discuss here), a large number of which depict either Surén himself or the male athletes from his training school undertaking a range of physical activities. Some capture the athletes during training, tanned and oiled, with incredible muscular definition, and full of ‘explosive power’; in others, the men are carefully posed in order to demonstrate specific exercises which, if practiced correctly, could improve one’s strength, stamina, agility and

levels of endurance (Figure 3). In all of the images the light source has been positioned to take full advantage of the subject's physique and, as was customary, the men are devoid of superfluous body hair.<sup>138</sup> As noted above, some of the figures in the photographs have been subject to minor post-production alteration by the addition of 'trunks' or a blurring of the pubic area. Others, however, have been subject to more drastic modification having had their backgrounds completely removed. Commenting on the latter, Surén stated that this 'uniformity' was introduced to show the exercises more clearly and to make the pictures more presentable. Yet, by stylizing the images and objectifying the bodies of the athletes in this way, one wonders how many readers were inadvertently alienated by the idealized physique celebrated by Surén, and how many considered them a realistic and personally achievable goal.

Though a former army physical training officer (1903-1925), Surén was disdainful of the regimented 'command and drill' of military discipline.<sup>139</sup> Instead, he promoted the self-discipline of gymnastics as the most beneficial 'mode of self-discovery' for both sexes. He declared; '[o]nly deeds cultivate will-power. The deed of today is the purpose of tomorrow [...] True beauty is seldom inborn; it must be won by personal attainment'.<sup>140</sup> He was quick to point out, however, that training sessions should be strictly segregated. Whilst one might assume that this was purely to avoid accusations of immorality, a closer examination confirms that it was because Surén (in line with other advocates of *Nacktgymnastik* or 'naked gymnastics')<sup>141</sup> perceived men and women to be psychologically and physiologically different. Although it was fine for young boys to lay down the foundations of their fitness in 'functional gymnastics classes' run by female educators, it was wrong for adult males to think they could 'attain strength and manly beauty in gymnastic schools conducted by women, and [for them] not [to] perceive how much it goes against Nature that a man should try to gain strength under feminine guidance'.<sup>142</sup> Similarly, many women had 'linked

themselves with masculine activities in gymnastics, sport and games' but for Surén there were many questions still unanswered. He continued,

one does not know whether all forms of masculine activity are good for the female body. It would be a great pity if our maidens became clumsy, unfeminine, and inharmonious through one-sided exercise. [...] Women must be strong and hardy, but despite this must not lose what is her eternal nature-feminine harmony of movements and of body.<sup>143</sup>

In contrast to the male bodies, the female figures displayed in *Man and Sunlight* are lightly tanned, slim, graceful, toned and supple; personifications of the energetic and exuberant forms of modern dance, eurythmics and rhythmic gymnastics being developed around this time by Émile Jacques-Dalcroze,<sup>144</sup> and Rudolf Laban (Figure 4).<sup>145</sup> In all but a few of the images-from which the backgrounds have been removed-the women are depicted dancing, stretching, and playing against natural backdrops (be it verdant forest vegetation, open parkland, or the sea shore).

**Figure 4:** Representing the female body in *Man and Sunlight*. Source: H.Surén, *Man and Sunlight*. Translated by D.A.Jones (Slough, Sollux, 1927) p.15.

At first glance, it would appear that *Man and Sunlight* simply reproduced traditional binary notions of masculinity and femininity, by advocating different types of physical activity for men and women<sup>146</sup> and by making an explicit connection between nature and the feminine psyche.<sup>147</sup> For example, although Surén encouraged women to participate in nude outdoor activity and to become ‘strong and hardy’, he was acutely aware that the future of the race lay in their hands and it is unlikely that the hard, muscular form of the female body-builder (and, specifically, the cessation in menstruation that sometimes occurs following extreme physical exercise) would have lent itself well to child-bearing and nurture. It is necessary, however, to consider these ideas within the wider context of his discourse and, in particular, in relation to his ideas on nature and the human condition. As noted above, Surén revered societies which he believed to have (or to have maintained) a close synergy with nature and at every opportunity he urged his all readers, both men and women, to re-discover their natural ‘flows’ and ‘rhythms’ in order to create a more harmonious society. In valuing highly *closeness* to nature and an awareness of the physical materiality of one’s body, one might argue that Surén’s text (whether consciously or not) destabilizes the traditional male-female binary in which these characteristics (real or perceived) were attributed a negative connotation.

Rhodes suggests that the discontent of the Primitivist was often characterized to varying degrees by nostalgia; ‘the Primitivist will not judge the ideal state of the world to be in the present [...] it will either be located in the past, or in the future, where it takes the form of a Utopian dream of a ‘return’ to some previous state of grace’.<sup>148</sup> For Surén (and in phenomenology), this was a nostalgia for ‘a supposedly more authentic, engaged and “natural” perception of the world, one which [had been] lost as a result of the installation of an objective, modern, detached perspective’.<sup>149</sup> Surén emphasised that although the



longing for nature and sunlight might only have limited expression initially, someday this would develop into a power which would lead people to the ‘strength and soundness of mind’ that urban society was debilitating.<sup>150</sup> He applauded those who embraced his philosophy stating;

Hail to you all, you who have recognised the time! Hail to you, you who hunger to be out amid nature, that you may steel and uplift the body and spirit! You are the bearers of the Olympic spirit! You are the leaders to sunlight-humanity!<sup>151</sup>

Yet, like many naturists, and other open-air enthusiasts in Britain, Surén was wary that a rapid, wholesale adoption of his ideas might lead to a watered-down and potentially ‘superficial’ appropriation of his principles.<sup>152</sup> The redemption of society during indigent times would depend upon knowledgeable leaders, those with ‘sunlight in their hearts and their senses open to new perceptions’.<sup>153</sup> Like many of his contemporaries, Surén saw this potential leadership in youth and progressive outdoor youth movements like the Wandervögel.<sup>154</sup> He reported them full of tenacity in their struggle for ‘truth’, and no longer deceived by rank authority and admonition, they were a common flame freeing themselves from ‘sunless urban dungeons’ and ‘outworn educational systems’.<sup>155</sup> He remarked, however, that they ought to be more conscious of their power. For Surén, their strength was not in politics as demonstrated in later years by the Hitler Youth. Rather, it was their duty to raise awareness of the beneficial nature of sunlight in the public imagination: to raise themselves above the ‘vicissitudes’ of the day, to be ‘warriors’, fighting for the rights and joys of sunlight, to bring ‘light’ and ‘healing’ to those who hungered for redemption, and to fight their way through the ‘darkness of the age’.

## Conclusion

*Man and Sunlight*, without doubt a product of its time, reflects contemporary European-wide debates on urbanism, nationhood, health and the benefits to be accrued through closer contact with nature. Surén and his fellow naturists believed that an increased intimacy with nature through nudity developed individual character, strength and self-discipline, which in turn, could restore health, vitality and morality to the nation. By combining the best parts of ‘civilisation’ and the ‘primitive’ it was assumed that individuals would discover and experience their ‘true’ selves. This discovery of one’s ‘true self’ would, in turn, necessitate and later sustain, a more harmonious being, balanced in body and mind. There were, of course, a number of ways in which this ‘truth’ could express itself and it is necessary to remain critical of the discourses presented within *Man and Sunlight* and other early twentieth century naturist texts. For example, although Surén promoted a Corinthian sporting ethic in which all members of society were expected to ‘improve’ their health and physique according to their gender, age and ability, it is important to recognise that these roles worked to, and were measured against, a schema in which the youthful, able-bodied physique was embodied as the ideal (although his contemporary Parmelee (1929) was perhaps even more overt, providing a detailed catalogue of standardized body-part ratios for both men and women). There is a danger, however, if our critiques focus only on the values underlying the naturists’ fascination with the body as a site of representation that we ignore a crucial facet of naturist philosophy - that which celebrates the materiality of the body and, in particular, sensory experience other than the visual.

Surén reinforced the need to re-evaluate the traditional mind/body dualism in which the body is merely an incidental container for the mind. He directly opposed any attempt to marginalise the material concerns of human existence celebrating, instead, the ‘immeasurable’ effects of the environment on the body, the fleeting phenomenal

encounter, and the minutiae of environmental experience. For Surén, nakedness and freedom of the body in nature was an embodied and investigative journey through space; the body was no longer simply a ‘machine for living in’.<sup>156</sup> Another key element of naturist literature is the sensuous way in which nakedness was thought to provide a way of re-opening the connections, flows and a ‘lost’ intimacy between the human body and the natural environment. In providing explicit examples of the ways in which Surén and his contemporaries experienced the natural environment through embodied practice and experience, I have endeavoured to highlight not only the richness of their personal narratives, but also the way in which they conceptualised human-nature relationships and the epistemological connections between early naturist philosophy and contemporary phenomenological theory. Naturists’ experience of the natural environment was a dynamic, reflexive and multi-sensory encounter through which they experienced a heightened awareness of their body in space, its movement through space, sensory perception, and action of the environment upon the body. One hesitates to describe this relationship as ‘interactive’ though, as the concept of interaction implies a mutual or reciprocal action between two discrete entities. Although Surén had particular views on ‘primitivism’ (a state to which he did not wish to return), his concept of ‘natural rhythm’ suggests that humans were very much part of nature and the sooner individuals recognised, and accepted, this the better. In this sense, a reconsideration of naturist texts which takes into consideration the sensory and embodied geographies of naturism might tell us something different about naturist practice and, by association, other outdoor cultures, but also provide fresh insights into corporeal relations.

### **Acknowledgements**

I am grateful to David Atkinson, Suzy Reimer, David Sibley, Charles Withers and Jane Jacobs for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this paper and to the two

anonymous referees for their supportive feedback. This research was funded by a Department of Geography Postgraduate Studentship, University of Hull. Every effort has been made to trace the copyright holder and to obtain their permission to use the copyright material. The publisher would be grateful if notified of any corrections that should be incorporated in future reprints of this journal.

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<sup>1</sup> H.Surén, *Man and sunlight*. Translated by D.A.Jones (Slough, Sollux, 1927) p.1.

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- <sup>9</sup> M.Bull et al, 'introducing', p.5.
- <sup>10</sup> Lens, Modern sun-worship: II-Its history, *The New Statesman* 8 October (1921b), pp.10–12; F.Merrill and M.Merrill, *Among the nudists* (London, Douglas, 1931); J.Gray, Retrospect—the early days, *British Naturism* 77(Autumn) (1983), p.5; H.Thompson,

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<sup>24</sup> M.Farber, Phenomenology, in J.O.Urmson, ed., *The concise encyclopaedia of western philosophy and philosophers* (London, Hutchinson, 1960), pp.292–295; P.Cloke, C.Philo and D.Sadler, *Approaching human geography: An introduction to contemporary theoretical debates* (London, Paul Chapman, 1991).

<sup>25</sup> Wylie, *Landscape*, p.141.

<sup>26</sup> Wolin, *Heidegger*.

<sup>27</sup> Surén, *Man*, p.2.

<sup>28</sup> G.Simmel, *The Metropolis and mental life*, in D.Frisby and M.Featherstone, eds., *Simmel on culture* (London, Sage, 1997); R.Burt, *Alien bodies: representations of modernity, ‘race’ and nation in early modern dance* (London, Routledge, 1998); Lewis, ‘climbing’.

<sup>29</sup> D.Frisby and M.Featherstone, eds., *Simmel on culture* (London: Sage, 2000), p.178.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Surén, *Man*, p.75.

<sup>32</sup> D.Frisby, ed., *The philosophy of money by Georg Simmel*, Translated by T.Bottomore and D.Frisby (Second Edition) (London, Routledge, 1990); Frisby and Featherstone, *Simmel*.

<sup>33</sup> Frisby and Featherstone, *Simmel*.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.251.

<sup>37</sup> D.Pick, *Faces of degeneration: A European disorder, c.1848-c.1918* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989); P.Gruffudd, 'A crusade against consumption': environment, health and social reform in Wales 1900–1939, *Journal of Historical Geography* 21 (1995), pp.39-54; T.Garb, *Bodies of modernity: Figure and flesh in fin-de-siècle France* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1998).

<sup>38</sup> D.G.Horn, *Social bodies: science, reproduction, and Italian modernity* (Chichester, Princeton University Press, 1994); R.Pope, *War and society in Britain, 1899-1948* (London, Longman, 1991); Worpole, Sun.

<sup>39</sup> M.Boscagli, *Eye on the flesh: Fashions of masculinity in the early twentieth century* (Oxford, Westview Press, 1996).

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<sup>42</sup> G.S.Hutchinson, Sunlight treatment for miners, *The Times* 16 December (1927), p.10.

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<sup>43</sup> Surén, *Man*, p.vi.

<sup>44</sup> Lewis, 'climbing', p.67.

<sup>45</sup> French philosopher Michel Serres provides a contemporary illustration of this argument in his book *Les Cinq Sens* where he derides urban-dwelling scholars who sit huddled at their desks like 'desensitized robots'. Howes, 'introduction'.

<sup>46</sup> Surén, *Man*, p.66.

<sup>47</sup> Surén, *Surén-Gymnastik*; Surén, *Man*; Lewis, 'climbing'.

<sup>48</sup> A.Kaes, M.Jay and E.Dimendberg, eds., *The Weimar Republic sourcebook* (London, University of California Press, 1994), p.285.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p.286.

<sup>50</sup> Surén, *Man*, p.2.

<sup>51</sup> S.Pile, *The body and the city: Psychoanalysis, space and subjectivity* (London, Routledge, 1996); H.Nast and S.Pile, eds., *Place through the body* (London, Routledge, 1998); R.Butler and H.Parr, eds., *Mind and body spaces: Geographies of illness, impairment and disability* (London, Routledge, 1999).

<sup>52</sup> Surén, *Man*, p.39. On the late eighteenth century transition of chemistry from a field of human techniques and sensuous analysis to a domain of laboratory technology and mathematical analysis see L.Roberts, 'The death of the sensuous chemist: The 'new' chemistry and the transformation of sensuous technology', in D.Howes, ed., *Empire of the senses: The sensual culture reader* (Oxford, Berg, 2005), pp.106-127.

<sup>53</sup> Wylie, *Landscape*, p.148.

<sup>54</sup> Anon, Review of Hans Surén's 'Man and Sunlight', *The New Statesman* 19 November (1927), p.184 (p.184).

<sup>55</sup> Lens, 'Modern sun-worship: I-Its creed', *The New Statesman* 24 September (1921), pp.670-671.

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<sup>57</sup> Parmelee, Nudity.

<sup>58</sup> Medical Correspondent, Sunlight and the skin, *The Times* 'Sunlight and Health Number' 22 May (1928), p.xiii; Lens, Modern sun-worship: III-Its high priest and his temple, *The New Statesman* 15 October (1921), pp.42–43; Lens, Modern sun-worship: IV-Its rewards and warnings, *The New Statesman* 22 October (1921), pp.71–72.

<sup>59</sup> D.Howes, Skinscapes: Embodiment, culture and environment, in C.Classen, ed., *The book of touch* (Oxford, Berg, 2005), pp.27-38.

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<sup>61</sup> Anon, In the sun, *The Times* 19 July (1929), p.15 (p.15).

<sup>62</sup> Anon, Sunburn, *The Times* 8 June (1939), p.17.

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<sup>69</sup> K.Huldschinsky, Open-air culture in Germany, *The Times* 'Sunlight and Health Number' 22 May (1928), p.xxvii; Parmelee, Nudity; Anon, England for sun baths, *The Times* 7 June (1930), p.13.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Surén, *Man*, p.104.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p.184.

<sup>73</sup> Tolia-Kelly, 'affect', p.215.

<sup>74</sup> Surén, *Man*, p.51.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p.51.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p.186.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p.186.

<sup>78</sup> V.C.Friesen, A tonic of wilderness: Sensuousness in Henry David Thoreau, in D.Howes, ed., *Empire of the senses: The sensual culture reader* (Oxford, Berg, 2005), pp.251-264.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p.256; Wylie describes a similar level of immersion in his account of walking the South West Coast Path where he found himself ‘in the thick of it: wet, livid green ferns all around, the Path a thin muddy rope. Limbs and lungs working hard in a haptic, step-by-step engagement with nature matter’. Unlike Surén and Thoreau, however, his experience appears to have been typified by dogged endurance rather than courageous fortitude.

Wylie, ‘single’, p.239.

<sup>80</sup> Friesen, ‘tonic’.

<sup>81</sup> Surén, Man, p.60.

<sup>82</sup> Howes, ‘introduction’, p.3.

<sup>83</sup> Howes, ‘introduction’, p.3.

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<sup>87</sup> Surén, Man, p.39.

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- <sup>92</sup> J.Hockey, Sensing the run: The senses and distance running, *Senses and Society* 1(2) (2006), pp.183-201; Wylie, Landscape.
- <sup>93</sup> Parmelee, Nudity, p.18.
- <sup>94</sup> Anon, Tan Talk, *British Naturism* 8(Spring) (1966), p.5 (p.5).
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- <sup>99</sup> S.G.Jones, State intervention in sport and leisure between the wars, *Journal of Contemporary History* XXII (1987), pp.163–182; G.E.Cherry, Changing social attitudes towards leisure and the countryside in Britain, 1890–1990, in S.Glyptis, ed., *Leisure and the environment: Essays in honour of Professor J. A. Patmore* (London, Belhaven, 1993), pp.67–86; D.Matless, The English outlook: A mapping of leisure, 1918–1939, in N.Alfrey and S.Daniels, eds., *Mapping the landscape: Essays on art and cartography* (Nottingham, University of Nottingham, University Art Gallery and Castle Museum, 1990) pp.28–32.
- <sup>100</sup> Fryer, Nudes; Thompson, Carry; Bell and Holiday, 'Naked'; Cover, 'naked'.
- <sup>101</sup> J.Lewinski, *The naked and the nude: A history of the nude in photographs, 1839 to the present* (New York, Harmony, 1987); Bell and Holiday, 'Naked'; Cover, 'naked'.
- <sup>102</sup> Worpole, Sun, p.44. In 1926-7 Sollux published a series books on actinotherapy and the treatment of TB, rickets, and wounds with natural and artificial UV light, including a translation of *Sonne als heilmittel* (Sunlight as healer) (1926) by Franz Thederling.
- <sup>103</sup> W.A.Ewing, *The body: photoworks of the human form* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1994); D.Chapman, *Adonis: The male physique pin-up, 1870-1940* (Swaffham, Éditions Aubray Walker, 1997).
- <sup>104</sup> Surén, Man, p.1.

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<sup>105</sup> Howes, 'skinscapes'.

<sup>106</sup> Surén, *Man*, p.59.

<sup>107</sup> Toepfer, *Empire*.

<sup>108</sup> Surén, *Man*, p.35.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p.36.

<sup>110</sup> Worpole, *Sun*, p.45.

<sup>111</sup> Surén, *Man*, p.79.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32.

<sup>113</sup> P.G.Berman, *Body and the body politic in Edvard Munch's Bathing Men*, in K.Adler and M.Pointon, eds., *The body imagined: Human form and visual culture since the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.71–83. Although this image is open to homoerotic interpretation and might seem fairly eccentric to a contemporary audience, as Classen notes, '[t]oday as in the monastic cults of old, almost every tactile encounter may be invested with libidinous implications'. It is important to recognise that mud bathing (privately indoors, in a spa environment, or outdoors with friends) as a health-giving pursuit was a popular, if not widely publicised, pastime amongst many men and women in Britain during the 1930s. C.Classen, *Pleasure*, in C.Classen, ed., *The book of touch* (Oxford, Berg, 2005) pp.69-71 (p.71).

<sup>114</sup> Surén, *Man*, p.88.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.41-42.

<sup>116</sup> Chapman, *Adonis*.

<sup>117</sup> On the 'natural' look favoured by Surén see Garb, *Bodies*, pp.68-72.

<sup>118</sup> C.Rhodes, *The primitive and primitivism*, in *Primitivism and modern art* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1994), pp.13-22 (p.13). On the historical use of the term 'primitive'

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<sup>119</sup> Torgovnick, 'Gone', p.160.

<sup>120</sup> D.Miller, Primitive art and the necessity of primitivism to art, in S.Hiller, ed., *The myth of primitivism: Perspectives on art* (London, Routledge, 1991), pp.50-71 (p.56).

<sup>121</sup> Wylie, *Landscape*, p.183.

<sup>122</sup> Rhodes, 'primitive', p.13.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>124</sup> Torgovnick, *Gone*, p.160.

<sup>125</sup> Surén, *Man*, pp.150-151.

<sup>126</sup> Parmelee, *Nudity*, pp.13-14.

<sup>127</sup> Boscagli, *Eye*; Garb, *Bodies*; Bell and Holiday, 'Naked'.

<sup>128</sup> For contemporary comparisons see Parmelee, *Nudity*, and Newman, *Building*.

<sup>129</sup> Surén, *Man*, p.141.

<sup>130</sup> Bourke, 'Inspecting'; M.A.Budd, *The sculpture machine: physical culture and body politics in the age of empire* (London, Macmillan, 1997).

<sup>131</sup> Surén, *Man*, p.132.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p.157.

<sup>133</sup> W.van der Will, The body and the body politic as symptom and metaphor in the transition of German culture to National Socialism, in B.Taylor and W.van der Will, eds., *The Nazification of art: Art, design, music, architecture and film in the Third Reich* (Winchester, The Winchester Press, 1990), pp.14–52.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> Surén, *Man*, p.ix.



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<sup>136</sup> On the association of body culture and nudism with National Socialism and Nazism see V.Preston-Dunlop, Laban and the Nazis, towards an understanding of Laban, Rudolf and the Third Reich, *Dance Theatre Journal* 6(2) (1988), pp.4–7; H.Eichberg, Race-track and labyrinth: the space of physical culture in Berlin, *Journal of Sport History* 17(2) (1990), pp.245–260; W.van der Will, ‘body’; Ewing, Body; Boscagli, Eye; Cooper, Fully; Toepfer, Empire; J.Margolis, Dark side of the fresh air utopians, *The Guardian (Saturday Review)* 12 June (1999), p.3; Krüger et al., ‘Nudism’.

<sup>137</sup> V.Preston-Dunlop, ‘Laban’; M.Connolly and A.Lathrop, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Rudolf Laban—an interactive appropriation of parallels and resonances, *Human Studies* 20(1) (1997), pp.27–45; T.J.Gordon, Fascism and the female form: performance art in the Third Reich, *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11(1/2) (2002), pp.164-200.

<sup>138</sup> Cooper, Fully.

<sup>139</sup> Toepfer, Empire; Taylor and van der Will, Nazification; Krüger, ‘manliness’.

<sup>140</sup> Surén, Man, p.111.

<sup>141</sup> Möhring, ‘German’.

<sup>142</sup> Surén, Man, p.175.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p.173.

<sup>144</sup> R.C.Beacham, Appia, Jacques-Dalcroze, and Hellerau, Part One: Music made visible, *New Theatre Quarterly* 1(2) (1985), pp.154–164; R.C.Beacham, Appia, Jacques-Dalcroze, and Hellerau, Part Two: Poetry in motion, *New Theatre Quarterly* 1(3) (1985), pp.245–261.

<sup>145</sup> Preston-Dunlop, ‘Laban’; Gordon, ‘Fascism’.

<sup>146</sup> L.Johnston, Flexing femininity: female body-builders refiguring ‘the body’, *Gender, Place and Culture* 3(3) (1996), pp.327-340; Möhring, ‘German’.

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<sup>147</sup> G.Rose, V.Kinnard, M.Morris and C.Nash, Feminist geographies of environment, nature and landscape, in Women in Geography Study Group, eds., *Feminist geographies: explorations in diversity and difference* (Harlow, Longman, 1997), pp.146-189.

<sup>148</sup> Rhodes, 'primitive', p.20; Miller, 'primitive'.

<sup>149</sup> Wylie, *Landscape*, p.182.

<sup>150</sup> Surén, *Man*.

<sup>151</sup> Surén, *Man*, p.196.

<sup>152</sup> *Matless, Landscape*.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p.179.

<sup>154</sup> Anon, *Wander youths: organised hiking in Germany*, *The Times* 20 August (1931), p.15; P.D.Stachura, *The German Youth Movement 1900-1945: An interpretive and documentary history* (London, Macmillan, 1981); Eichberg, 'race-track'.

<sup>155</sup> Here I take 'truth' to indicate an original state in Nature. Surén stated, '[i]n nature the very blood sings in our veins, we regain knowledge of feeling, of wonder, of belief. All this cannot be measured, gauged, or compassed by the intellect—and yet it is living truth. Truth; buried by the "achievements" of civilisation, by the miasma of the towns, by the evils of smoking and drink, and covered by the cloak of overbred intellectualism' (*Man*, pp.149-150).

<sup>156</sup> Worpole, *Sun*.