

CRAFTING THE IDEAL WOMAN: PHOTOMECHANICAL MANIPULATION IN EDMOND DESBONNET'S PHYSICAL CULTURE PUBLICATIONS

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The aesthetic merits of the conditioned body were paramount to Edmond Desbonnet. In the early years of the twentieth century, photographs of male and female physiques that had been transformed by his own training methodology were a crucial component of the French physical culturist's marketing.¹ One of Desbonnet's missions was to free women from conservative social constraints, such as the wearing of corsets and the belief that they were inherently weaker than men. But he also used his magazines and books to promote his larger mission of helping both sexes excel in their biological functions so as to repopulate France. He fervently subscribed to pronatalist notions that women's biological purpose was to attract and please a male partner, and then to deliver and raise healthy children.² In Desbonnet's 1911 book *Pour devenir belle... et le rester [Acquiring Beauty and Keeping It]* and his longstanding magazine *La Culture Physique*, he used edited images of acrobatic performers, beauty contestants, and record-holding weightlifters to demonstrate his beliefs about women's health, social and biological capacities, and appearance.³ His sophisticated photo editing techniques altered his models' bodies, creating images that celebrated female strength while reinforcing pronatalist ideology and traditional gender roles.⁴ Desbonnet's publications used retouched images to demonstrate the effectiveness of his training methodology while reconciling female musculature with signs of conventional femininity.

Desbonnet's photomechanical imagery make clear the connections between a woman's outward appearance and those upstanding moral qualities that make her an ideal candidate for motherhood.⁵ To reflect the link between outer beauty and inner character, Desbonnet's models appear in his publications as subtly-manipulated, mixed-media objects, styled to emphasize gender dimorphism.⁶ Desbonnet made use of the hand-editing technique of overpainting to alter the appearance of the women he featured. As a form of retouching, overpainting allowed Desbonnet to reveal the exceptional musculature of women such as the Athléta family of strongwomen while exaggerating and emphasizing those physical features that still allowed them to conform to pronatalist gender norms. Desbonnet presented the bodies of Athléta and her three daughters as proof that women are not inherently weaker than men, celebrating their visible musculature. Yet he reinforced those features on their bodies that indicate

to readers that these models uphold their natural roles as women. Desbonnet presented muscular female bodies tempered with signs of social and biological femininity. With overpainting, Desbonnet could package his muscular female models to readers and potential clients as upholding the visual and behavioral attributes that made them ideal women.

Sport and physical culture were largely men's realms at the beginning of the twentieth century in France.⁷ Women who participated in strength activities had to do so within the confines of a social environment that prescribed distinct roles for each sex.⁸ Georges Vigarello has shed light on the links made between outward appearance and moral character in early twentieth century discourses on women's physical activity. Women were largely encouraged to participate in sport to cultivate balance between different anatomical features and character traits. Vigarello writes that women's health and beauty were imagined to encompass physical and mental efficacy, and different types of gymnastics were prescribed to help women move towards a holistic unity between inner health and its outward reflection. More broadly, the individual woman's role in aesthetic and moral improvement would ideally extend to the health of the entire nation.⁹ A woman participating in inner and aesthetic self-improvement through exercise was to do so as a contribution to French social stability.

A number of art historians and sports historians in recent years have elucidated the importance of attending to visual and material culture when examining gendered sociocultural practices associated with sport.¹⁰ In particular, scholars have illuminated the prominent role that physical culture publications had in shaping and disseminating bodily ideals for both men and women in turn-of-the-century France, and in prescribing physical and moral norms for women immediately before and after the First World War.¹¹ Desbonnet's work is situated in the broader, multidisciplinary field of inquiry into women's physical culture, health and aesthetics, and illustrated physical

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culture publications. Photography was central to physical culture's promotion and spread, and to Desbonnet's work in particular.¹² Because Desbonnet's business depended on recruiting new clients, both male and female, his messaging had to remain as widely acceptable as possible to his target audience.¹³ Studies of Desbonnet's life and work have thus far focused primarily on his use of photography in light of his methodologies, writings, his place among his peer group, and his use of conventionally-attractive nude models to advertise his programs, without yet attending to the specific photomechanical techniques that allowed Desbonnet to present his methodologies and their purported results.¹⁴ It was the editing of his imagery prior to publishing them that allowed Desbonnet to prove that his methodology, even when taken to highly advanced stages, could allow a woman to be both strong and capable of fulfilling her social and biological role.

In several of Desbonnet's publications, the Athléta family serve as aspirational models for readers. Their bodies are edited to simultaneously reflect the visual manifestations of advanced athleticism and ideal pronatalist femininity.¹⁵ Desbonnet maintained that women could not develop the same amount of visible musculature as men.¹⁶ Retouched images allow the female body to demonstrate that strength training is beneficial for women, while reinserting traits, such as slenderness or curvature, that viewers expected to see on a feminine body. The fact that these photographed bodies are so heavily edited suggests that the live models, and their camera-made portraits, might not have exhibited the kind of balance between the aforementioned features that Desbonnet prized. While it is impossible to consider all his images of women here, several notable examples taken from glass plate collections, select issues of the magazine, and his guidebook for women, *Pour devenir belle... et le rester* indicate how he used hand editing to reconcile his contradictory beliefs during a period of conflicting and confining standards for women. Desbonnet's retouched images indicate that while the live body might not have successfully communicated his methodology's desired results, its edited image could.

PRONATALISM AND ITS PHOTOMECHANICAL MANIFESTATIONS

In the decades following the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, the French government encouraged certain citizens to reproduce for the sake of national renewal. Pronatalist ideology championed the healthy nuclear family units' responsibility to the state to procreate in a collective effort to combat French depopulation.¹⁷ Much of the pronatalist burden fell on women's shoulders. Images in early twentieth century media helped establish and reinforce the ideals and values of French heterosexual desire, procreation, family life, and distinct differences between men and women; these were values and cultural norms that many people felt to be under attack.¹⁸ Yet not everyone in this period believed that women should be entirely passive in response to male virility and activity: some physical culturists advocated for women's ability to use gymnastics and weight training to build themselves into

the strongest, most energetic versions of themselves to become better mothers, and to eschew notions that women were inherently weaker than men.¹⁹ Desbonnet was part of a broader movement championing women's exercise in the service of pronatalism, yet his methods and ideas were not universally accepted by other fitness theorists. Critics of Desbonnet's methods worried that too much emphasis on the aesthetic results of training could distract women from the health benefits of exercise.²⁰ His competitors cautioned that encouraging women to lift weight might prevent their bodies from reflecting signs of gender-appropriate balance, launching them into the realm of hyper-specialization and excess musculature.²¹ But Desbonnet believed that all women could achieve a balanced physique through specific forms of exercise, including personalized weight-training, in order to best improve their moral character and fulfill their roles as Republican women.

The widely accepted French female beauty standards in the early years of the twentieth century called for a narrow waist held in place by a corset, with smooth pale skin and lithe limbs.²² The desirability of these physical features, reflected in the period's advertising posters, store catalogues, magazines and beauty manuals, often carried over into the realm of female physical culture.²³ Women who practiced physical activity often felt pressure to keep both their actions and physiques in line with ideals of delicacy and modesty, and to use physical culture to cultivate these traits.²⁴ For example, many women in Belle Époque France practiced Swedish gymnastics, believing that the programs would give them small breasts, flat stomachs, and lightly rounded hips—all features widely associated with conventional femininity and fertility.²⁵ To deviate from the "feminine"—from features that indicated the feminine, such as the narrow waist—would risk a woman being seen as aggressive and masculine.²⁶ Physical attributes such as a straight spine, shapely limbs, a slim neck, and slender mid-section were believed to reflect a woman's adherence to feminine characteristics like demureness that would complement male virility.²⁷ A woman who eschewed her responsibilities to cultivate an attractively feminine appearance would be unable to *act* like a good woman, would struggle to attract a suitable partner, and would fail to become a wife and mother.

Desbonnet's illustrated publications emerged in a climate broadly concerned with shifting gender roles and a preoccupation with personal hygiene and appearance.²⁸ His images blended aesthetic and scientific models from a wide variety of historical and contemporary sources to demonstrate the kind of results to which his readers should aspire. In *La Culture Physique*, he proposes an understanding of beauty based on balanced bodily proportions inspired, in part, by Ancient Greek statues that he felt best reflected symmetrical and well-developed musculature. Desbonnet's reliance on statuary was not unique: Georges Hébert also looked to what he claimed to be physical and moral ideals borrowed from antique models and from non-Western women whose forms seemingly reflected natural conditioning.²⁹ More broadly in this period, refer-

ences to antique sculpture spoke to early twentieth century aesthetic ideals of slimness, physical symmetry, and uniform features.³⁰ Desbonnet claims that much Ancient Greek statuary represents absolute human perfection, but that contemporary bodies have strayed far from Greek aesthetic ideals.³¹

To combat French declining health and to improve the appearance of his clients, Desbonnet developed a multi-faceted program influenced in part by Hippolyte Triat's principles of muscular isolation, contemporary physiological science, weight training, and a myriad of other wellness practices.³² His plan involved three progressive components: starting with bodyweight and light resistance exercises, then moving to moderate weights and attention to aesthetic changes, and finally the athletic, performative stage.³³ Most practitioners were advised to engage in non-competitive, health-minded activity in keeping with the second stage. The importance of aesthetic results as a perfectly balanced reflection of internal health, and the use of weight training for women *and* men, set this method apart from competitors such as Georges Demeny who claimed to champion hygiene and health above all else, and from Hébert's "natural method" wherein aesthetics were paramount.³⁴ Using graduated weight training and a variety of visual models, Desbonnet promised to demonstrate the interconnectedness of health with aesthetics, without the passiveness evident in other contemporary prescriptions for women.³⁵

Desbonnet associated inner health and its associated physical manifestations with an ideal form of Republican citizenship predicated on gender dimorphism and individual strength.³⁶ His publications use carefully-styled images to demonstrate that the contemporary human body can be saved from physical and moral decay brought on by the Belle Époque's excesses. An image of Max Unger published in the June 1904 issue of *La Culture Physique* features the subject standing on a block, contorting his body in such a way as to mimic ancient Greek statuary (see figure 1). Unger wears only a paper leaf over his genitals. The minimal *mis-en-scène* here calls to mind statuary that one might encounter in a museum—a thin string holding the fig leaf in place on Unger's body is visible, revealing that the stylist tried to emulate the coverings often added to nude statuary after their creation. Unger's image does not betray obvious signs of having been edited by hand, in part because of the thin newsprint on which the image was printed. Yet thanks to styling and framing, images such as this suggest that certain visual traits are associated with desirable characteristics. In Unger's case, his pose and styling reference the classical proportions and physical symmetry viewers might associate with ancient sculpture. Unger appears on the magazine page as a virile, healthy male specimen with a physique to which readers should aspire.

In *Pour devenir belle*, images of statuary establish certain visual standards for the female form, namely symmetrical features, smooth skin, and musculature balanced with feminine curvature.³⁷ Early in the book, there are images of two models whose bodies forge a connection

between ancient ideals and contemporary women. They illustrate that beauty is individual, while still being predicated on balance: *La beauté blonde* and *La beauté brune*—Jeanne Delyane and Yetta Rianza, respectively (see figure 2). Both women pose in such a way as to attract the viewer's attention to specific parts of their bodies: their bare arms and décolletage, narrow waists, and rounded hips. In showing readers that Delyane and Rianza's bodies exhibit hourglass shapes and symmetry, similar to some of the physical ideals evident in statuary, Desbonnet suggests that the qualities he prizes as feminine beauty are timeless and can be achieved by following his training methods. Desbonnet writes that beauty is the exterior manifestation of physical and internal perfection, suggesting that the two models' forms mirror their character.³⁸ Desbonnet includes these highly stylized models to indicate that external beauty can be made tangible and concrete, and that physical culture can help women mold their entire selves to sculpted ideals.³⁹

Desbonnet's own prescriptions for female physical culture promised to help women achieve their own version of feminine physical perfection. Desbonnet explains his goals for women in written form, and provides images to illustrate what an ideal result might look like for

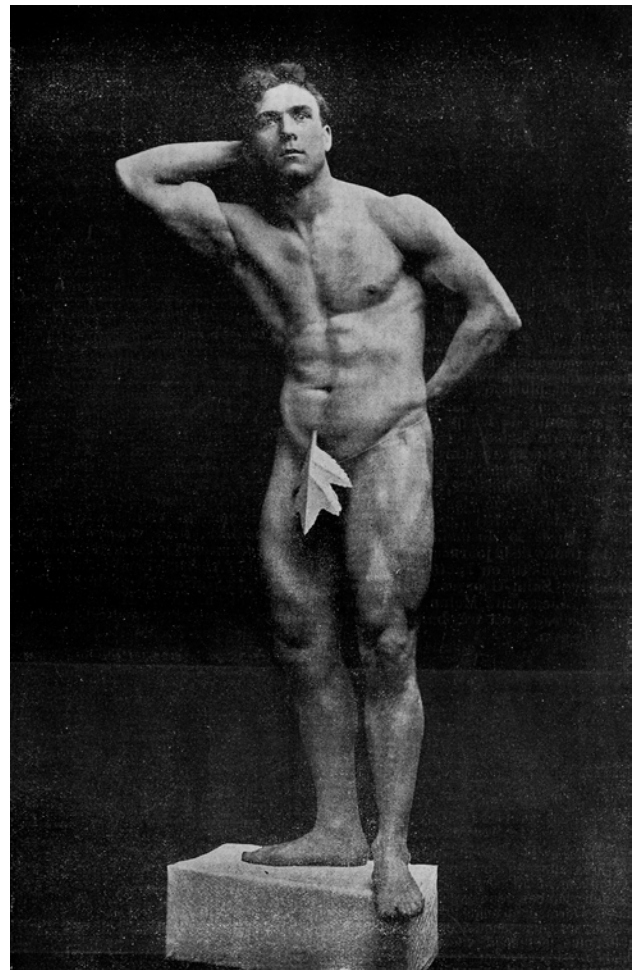


Figure 1. "Les produits de la culture physique raisonnée: Max Unger (Strongfort)," photomechanical image in *La Culture Physique* (June 1904), 71.

an individual. An image in *Pour devenir belle...* shows a young female model perched on a pillar, wearing a gathered leotard that reveals her long, blemish-free arms and legs draped over her perch (see figure 3).⁴⁰ The image's caption explains that this vigorous musculature is remarkably beautiful. The model's contorted pose emphasizes her narrow waist, and sanguine facial expression invite us to compare her to a statue, much like how Max Unger's image recalled ancient statuary, and which Desbonnet signals as visually pleasing in the caption. The image's background has been entirely replaced by solid black, suggesting that the model's form was cut away from its initial studio setting. The image has been edited prior to printing to create the impression of an uncluttered link between statuary and contemporary bodies. In his image of the female model, seemingly floating in a-temporal space, Desbonnet presents the body as a work of art. He invites viewers to admire the fact that the living subject's form has been sculpted by deliberate activity and long-term discipline, despite the fact that the image has been edited. In this image, the viewer is treated to what appears to be visual proof of successful female physical culture practice. A real woman reading the book could aspire to turn her own form into a timeless work of art, using Desbonnet's methods to sculpt her features into desirably feminine shapes.

OVERPAINTING

Desbonnet's publications prior to the First World War are illustrated with photomechanical images printed in halftone. The halftone printing process was the first technical development that allowed publishers in the late

nineteenth century to print photographs onto newspaper and magazine paper. The technique involves etching two sheets of glass with ruled parallel lines. These lines are filled with blank ink, creating the appearance of a thin screen. The two sheets of ruled glass can then be laid over a light-sensitive plate in a camera. The transparent spaces between the etched lines let light pass through the glass plates in the camera, therefore allowing for a faithful capturing of the dark and light areas in the subject being photographed.⁴¹ The light and dark tones of the subject are translated onto the printing plate in a series of dots of varying sizes. Halftone printing was revolutionary in part for producing photographic images on pages alongside text—before halftone, publishers had to include images and text on separate pages.⁴² Desbonnet's books and magazines take full advantage of the creative possibilities allowed by halftone, combining images and text in dynamic compositions, and



Figure 3. "Cette musculature vigoureuse est remarquablement belle," photomechanical image in *Pour devenir belle... et le rester*, 128.

blending the new printing technique with more traditional forms of handmade illustration.

Desbonnet was passionate about images. He used photography and editing to record his professional achievements (in the form of visual changes evident on his students' bodies), to demonstrate to viewers how to execute his movements, and to inspire current and aspiring followers. Desbonnet viewed the photograph of a muscled body as a prized, collectable object itself, but also as tangible proof of the validity of his method.⁴³ In other words, Desbonnet saw photographs as a vehicle for creative expression and as a means of creating a tangible, lasting product out of his practical methodology. Photographs of students and of notable athletes were also advertisements: they made readers and viewers aware of what a body *could* look like with the right kind of disciplined work. But when a photographic negative failed to show signs of Desbonnet's and his subject's hard work, overpainting emerged as a means of bridging practice with appearance.

Prior to printing, all photomechanical images in late nineteenth and early twentieth century illustrated magazines were edited using a process known as retouching.⁴⁴ Retouching refers to a direct hand-made intervention onto a photograph's surface. But the more specific practice of



Figure 2. Photomechanical printed page featuring Jeanne Delyane and Yetta Rianza from *Pour devenir belle...et le rester*, 3.

“overpainting” indicates the process of literally painting over a photographic negative or print.⁴⁵ Retouching, and overpainting in particular, were often used in a corrective sense, to help photomechanical images clearly display relevant features and hide distracting details.⁴⁶ Beyond simply highlighting, erasing, or outlining elements in the composition, these processes involved framing and cropping to direct the viewer’s attention. Overpainting helped viewers “read” a photomechanical image in a predetermined context.

Thousands of Desbonnet’s own glass plate negatives and prints are currently held at the Musée du Sport in Nice. Many of these objects betray clear signs of overpainting, indicating that Desbonnet hoped to guide his readers in their interpretations of his imaged bodies. One example wherein overpainting is particularly evident features a nude, frontal image of a male client (see figure 4). The negative indicates that a heavy, clumsy leaf shape has been drawn over the genitalia, on the emulsion side of the negative. This covering appears to have been added with a thick marker, making it immediately apparent how it differs in appearance from the rest of the man’s body. Much closer inspection reveals that the man’s body has also been slimmed and shaped in more subtle ways. Underneath his biceps, along his shoulders, and between his upper thighs, an overpainter has scratched on top of the negative, adding contours that make the body appear slimmer. Ideally, visible signs of overpainting would be minimized when printed using half-tone onto newsprint or thicker book paper.⁴⁷ This editing, apparent to the naked eye on an unpublished negative, indicates that the camera alone had not captured a satisfactory body shape, and that the body itself, without retouching, might not have displayed the right balance of marketable, desirable traits.

VISUAL MANIFESTATIONS OF FEMALE STRENGTH

Female strength performers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century worked in a social environment that demanded that male and female bodies, regardless of social class, should be visibly distinct. But women who performed feats of strength and physical skill also had the power to destabilize ideological gender values through their actions and appearance.⁴⁸ Myrtho and the Salonne sisters were performers who depended on their physical conditioning and strength for their livelihoods.⁴⁹ They developed a level of physical strength and conditioning unusual for most women at the time, a fact that invited their bodies to subvert gender distinctions.⁵⁰ In early

twentieth century France, cultural paranoia about women transgressing “female” characteristics reflected a broader desire to maintain sexual dimorphism informed by natalist values. A woman who deviated from her biological role as passive, delicate, and motherly signaled physical and moral degeneracy.⁵¹ The belief that such transgression could be located visually *on* a woman’s body only added more tangible evidence to these claims. A woman who moved her body in a way that used brute force, or who exhibited a robust and powerful physique, showed herself to be biologically degenerate. While many commentators feared that socially emancipated women might disrupt the social order, Desbonnet reframed his images of physically strong women to appear as conventionally feminine as they were strong.⁵² Images of Delyane, Rianza, the dancer Myrtho, and the gymnasts known as the Salonne sisters indicate how Desbonnet’s publications used styling to emphasize models’ overt femininity, despite signs of professional athletic performance. Features that signal “woman,” such as waists, hips, and breasts are focal points in all the aforementioned examples. These images draw viewers’ attention to those aspects of models’ bodies that still subscribe to sexual dimorphism. They assuage readers’ fears that physical culture might make women seem too “manly,” for even these muscular bodies are made to seem feminine.

In *Pour devenir belle*, Desbonnet explains that women are afraid of doing away with restrictive fashion, and nearly always confuse strength with excess girth.⁵³ He writes that women misunderstand the very point of physical culture for the female sex: not to create unseemly muscle growth on a woman’s body, but to promote well being and all its moral and social attributes. To Desbonnet, women actually need physical activity more than men. While men need developed musculature to be virile, women require bodily harmony and the ability to adapt to childbirth and motherhood—factors upon which the entirety of the French race depend.⁵⁴ Accompanying his plea to women to use physical culture as preventative medicine are numerous photomechanical images of women whose forms illustrate Desbonnet’s arguments.⁵⁵ Pages such as that captured in figure 5 feature women whose nearly-nude bodies follow a general physical “type” and embody the attributes that Desbonnet praises in his writing: Myrtho and the Salonne sisters both have narrow waists and round hips, features that Desbonnet praises as healthily feminine. These women do not wear restrictive corsets and suggest that Desbonnet’s methods could free women from conservative clothing restrictions,



Figure 4. Edmond Desbonnet, photograph of nude male, glass plate negative, Musée National du Sport, Nice. Arrow added to indicate overpainting.

sculpting the body and rendering shape-changing garments, such as corsets, obsolete. Yet the bodies also exhibit defined arm musculature and prominent quadriceps. The text that surrounds the images insists that female strength correlates with beauty—that women should not be afraid of exercise as it can help them achieve bodies that balance curvature with musculature.⁵⁶ These three models seemingly act as proof that a woman can use exercise to enhance the conventional markers of her sex in a healthier and more effective way than the confining corset.

A CURIOUS CASE STUDY: ATHLÉTA

Desbonnet manipulated the bodies of one particular family of female athletes frequently in his publications. The Belgian weightlifter and performer Athléta appears in Desbonnet's magazines and books as an example of how a woman could surpass even the kinds of strength and beauty modeled by the Salonne sisters, Myrtho, Rianza, and Delyane, while still remaining an ideal picture of feminine health. Athléta, born in Anvers, used her married name of Van Huffelen in her personal life and performed feats of strength at exhibition venues and music halls around Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Athléta's three daughters also demonstrated their unusual strength at public showcases and in weight rooms throughout Europe. The young women appeared on their own, as a trio of sisters, and with their mother in Desbonnet's illustrated publications. Some extant images of the family posing in studio settings do not betray signs of overpainting, and emphasize the women's conditioned, muscular physiques without hand-drawn interventions. Yet retouched portraits, both published and unpublished, make clear that overpainting was used in multiple instances to reinsert signs of femininity on top of the body's photographic image. In the retouched examples, an overpainter has narrowed the women's waists and slimmed their chins. The resulting images demonstrate sculpted shoulders, quadriceps, and broad chests, with added delicate curvature and balanced hourglass physiques.

Several photographs in the Fonds Soury collection at the Museum of Civilizations of Europe and the Mediterranean demonstrate clear evidence of hand editing on the bodies of female lifters, including the Athléta family. There are two photographs on which overpainting has been done so clumsily that it is obvious to the naked eye, enabling clear analysis of the photographs' material make-up. These edited images are curious objects: they have been manipulated after the negative was printed. This is a departure from the more standard overpainting practice of drawing on a negative before printing the image

on paper. The overpainting on top of the prints alters the surface texture of the object. Against the smooth, uniform surface of the print, the fine scratch marks are rough and clumsy, making clear that several forms of mark making have composed the final product.

One of these images in the Fonds Soury Collection, an unpublished yet retouched photograph printed on glossy paper, is of the Athléta matriarch (see figure 6). The photograph portrays the strongwoman in three-quarter profile, dressed in a performer's leotard and slippers. Along her back and along the entirety of her frontal torso, an overpainter has scratched away at her body. These same scratch marks are also apparent on her neck and below her chin. Seen from a distance, Athléta has a very narrow waist in comparison to her muscled arms and legs. Those areas of her body that have been slimmed appear to blend into the studio backdrop. Her physique has been altered, after the photograph was taken and printed, to appear leaner. The contours of her body are rendered in an exaggerated hourglass shape very much in keeping with conventional standards of female body shapes and pronatalist physical culture.

In another example, a frontal shot of Athléta, wherein the lifter is photographed decorated with medals, obvious overpainting creates a dramatic contrast between a feminine, narrow waist, and well-muscled arms (see figure 7). Athléta leans on a rock in the photographer's studio, with one arm folded behind her back. Studio lighting emphasizes shadows that sculpt her biceps and shoulders. Along the sides of her legs, seemingly covered in smooth stockings, her quadriceps are subtly shaded. In this image, Athléta's torso has again been narrowed by hand. Under both sides of her bust, an overpainter has scratched away at



Figure 5. Photomechanical printed page featuring Myrtho and the Salonne sisters from *Pour devenir belle... et le rester*, 60.

her leotard's contours. The forearm that rests on the stone pedestal also shows clear signs of having been manipulated after the photograph was printed. Even as a decorated champion, Athléta's physique had to be slimmed and reshaped, suggesting that without any handmade interventions, her shape might not appear feminine enough for Desbonnet's publications. In both aforementioned examples, drawing ensures that Athléta's body exhibits clear signs of fertility despite the developed musculature captured by lighting, and then by the camera.

Desbonnet's personal collection of prints, held at the Musée National du Sport, offer dozens of examples of much subtler overpainting on prints, as well as on glass plate negatives. That the retouching in these prints is not as apparent as those in the Fonds Soury Collection indicates that the signs of editing on a photograph could easily go unnoticed by the untrained eye.⁵⁷ In the Nice examples, overpainters use sketch-like mark-making to adjust the bodies of Athléta's three daughters. Figure 8 is a photographic print depicting the three young women posing together with their arms above their heads with their backs bent. Anna, Louise, and Brada all wear leotards and stand against a dark studio backdrop. The young women smile at the camera invitingly. The overpainter's handmade interventions are most evident on the central figure's left hip and on the figure on the right's buttock. These two areas in particular have been narrowed, allowing the body's actual contours as captured by the camera to disappear into the background. The young women's legs seem mostly unedited, while the majority of the light marks cover each model's leotard, slimming and defining the curvature of their bodies. Thanks to handmade shaping, the Athléta women's forms appear very similar to the models of female health and beauty in Desbonnet's book pages. Though these young women are professional athletes, retouching has ensured that their bodies still exhibit signs of feminine balance.

Images of the three Athléta daughters depict narrow waists covered only by skin-tight leotards; their lack of clothing and heavy undergarments reinforces the fact

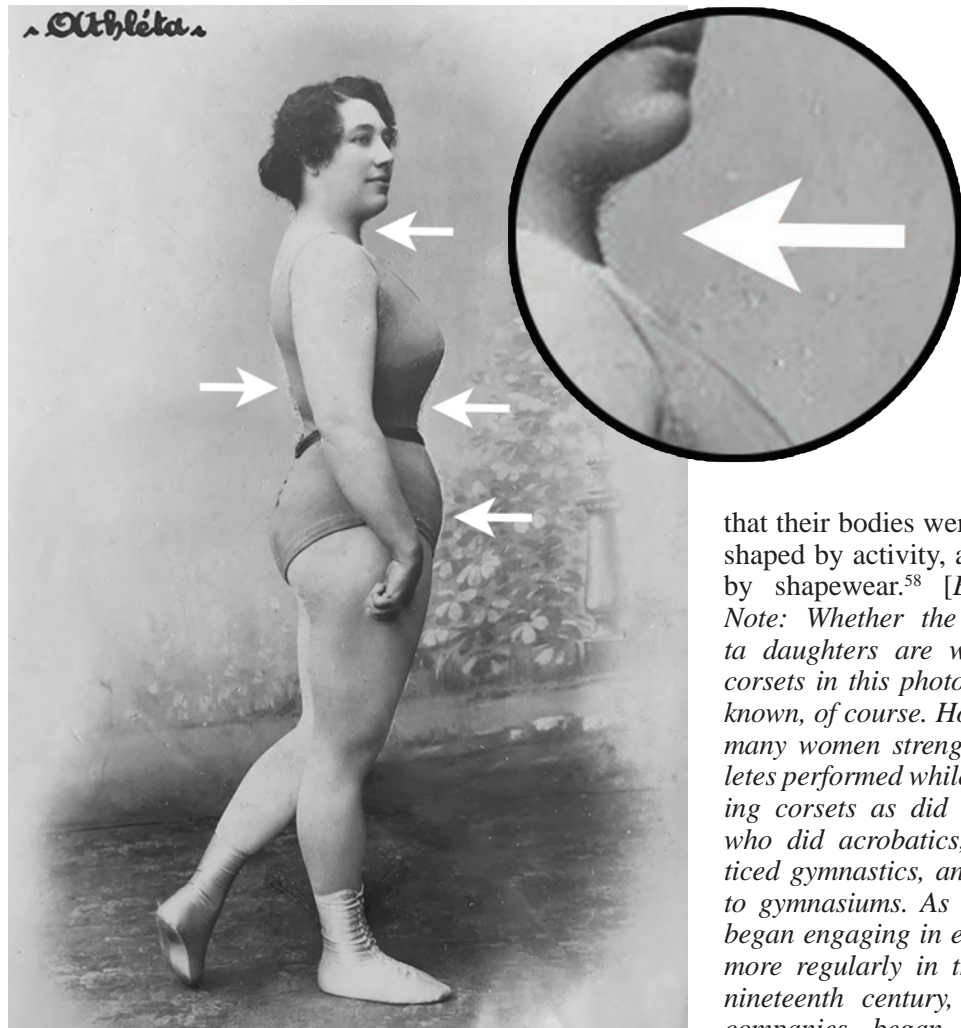


Figure 6. "Les 4 Athléta. Athléta." Photomechanical print with scratch marks. Collection Fonds Soury, Museum of Civilizations of Europe and the Mediterranean. Arrows added to indicate overpainting.

that their bodies were been shaped by activity, and not by shapewear.⁵⁸ [Editors' Note: Whether the Athléta daughters are wearing corsets in this photo is unknown, of course. However, many women strength athletes performed while wearing corsets as did women who did acrobatics, practiced gymnastics, and went to gymnasiums. As women began engaging in exercise more regularly in the late nineteenth century, a few companies began selling corsets designed to be worn while exercising. Eugen Sandow even endorsed one brand for a time.]

Desbonnet's contemporary Hébert was anxious about identifiable women posing nude for his publications, and covered his models' eyes in photographs. Desbonnet's subjects often confront the viewer directly.⁵⁹ Posed without shame, their images call to mind courtesans, using their near-nudity to attract and entertain.⁶⁰ Desbonnet's models were not the bourgeois women he targeted with his marketing; as performers, they were not considered the kind of role model appropriate for most young bourgeois women.⁶¹ But though working class, these women were not hard laborers, and the physical work in which they engaged set them apart from peasant women toiling for sustenance. His models' personas and likenesses were included in print as aspirational for physical culturists, as women who had achieved the third stage of his methodology, that of athleticism and performance. Despite their class, Athléta and other female athletes exhibited signs of feminine refinement, added by hand, and visible muscularity, captured by the camera.⁶² Their bodies suggested that physical culture could serve as a mid-way point between aristocratic leisure activities and low-brow entertainment.⁶³ And importantly, Desbonnet's performer-models



Figure 7. "Les 4 Athlétas. Athléta." Photomechanical print with scratch marks. Collection Fonds Soury, MUCEM. Arrows added to indicate overpainting.

were willing to pose in revealing clothing.⁶⁴ Already conditioned by training and willing to be featured with minimal covering, their appearances could be more easily edited to reflect desirable female features signaling healthy fertility and character.⁶⁵

Once reproduced as a halftone image, a photograph loses some evidence of having been manipulated by hand. The unpublished print might display signs of scratching and contouring primarily in how scratch marks and ink drawings alter the surface of the photograph. However, it can be nearly impossible to detect retouched areas when encountering a photomechanical image printed on thin newsprint page with halftone. Yet Desbonnet's pub-

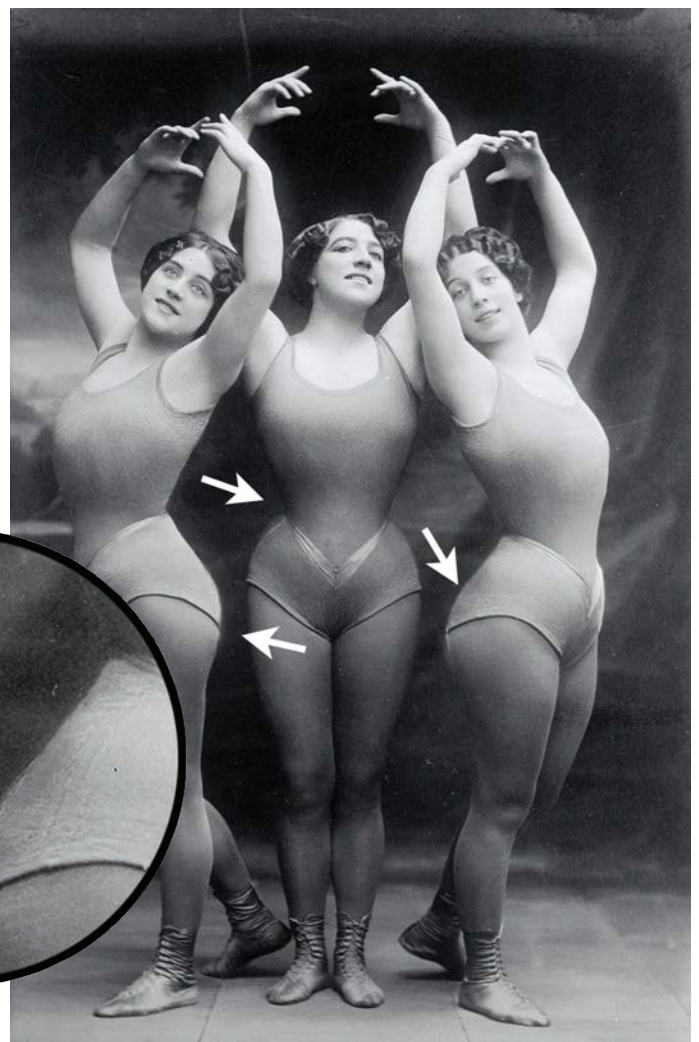
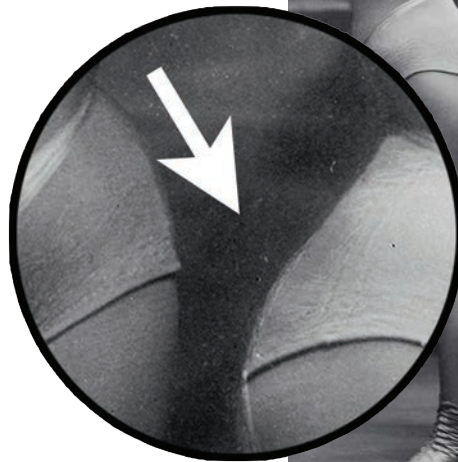


Figure 8. Anna, Louise, and Brada Athléta. Photographic print with hand editing. Fonds Desbonnet, Musée Nationale du Sport, Nice. Arrows added to indicate overpainting.

lications include many examples of photomechanical images that still betray signs of having been overpainted at some point in their journey from negative to magazine or book page thanks to blatant inconsistencies in line, shading, and shape. Such images often appear collage-like, blending soft contours with harsh outlines, and naturalistic depth with flattened areas more reminiscent of watercolor painting. While the camera captures the Athléta family's posed, styled, and muscular bodies, an overpainter has subsequently tempered their features with signs of sexual dimorphism.

The Athléta matriarch's images feature extensively in *Pour devenir belle*. Her body is larger and more robust than those of her daughters. As such, her photomechanical images often exhibit more involved retouching in attempts to add narrowness and demureness onto her form. A heavily-retouched example,

also published in *L'Illustration*, shows Athléta lifting five men, balanced on a bar, on her back and shoulders (see figure 9). Athléta's action in this image reminds readers that she is a professional athlete, albeit a retired one. The image supports Desbonnet's writing, which posits that this is not the standard to which regular women, even those dabbling in physical culture methodology, should aspire. Rather, Athléta is an exceptional case. Among women, she is notable for possessing a superior nervous system, which has helped the rest of her body develop past the point of being simply lithe and supple. She has surpassed the physical results and behavioral characteristics expected of most active women. Desbonnet suggests that she is a rare example of a woman raised in the same conditions as a man. And yet Desbonnet writes that despite lifting more than most men ever could, Athléta has never actually lost her feminine attributes. The image's extensive retouching is what allows Desbonnet to reconcile his celebration of Athléta's excessive strength with his praise of her femininity: overpainting on this image calls our attention to the "feminine qualities" of her body (her narrow waist and alluring countenance), while minimizing brute force or any strain that went into performing this lift.⁶⁶ The overpainter has defined each figure's features so crisply that we lose any sense of three-dimensionality, depth, or interaction between the bodies. Seeming utterly unphased by her strength and maintaining her feminine physicality, she appears in photomechanical, retouched form as the ideal female athlete. And against all odds, she is presented as proof that a woman's procreative potential can outlast even the most unusual physical attributes.

Desbonnet consistently uses overpainting and other forms of image editing to drive home the idea that the Athléta family's bodies can in fact conform to his prescriptions for women to be soft and feminine, adding features that the subjects may not have actually possessed. In the first issue of *La Culture physique*, photomechanical images of conditioned men and women provide visual proof that the trainer's methods have sculpted bodies beyond what might have been truly possible. In many of the publication's images, visual features play tricks on the viewer, pushing the limits of what training could physically achieve. On one such page, Athléta's seventeen-year-old daughter Brada poses in a studio portrait (see figure 10). She is identified in a caption as an athlete—strong, healthy, and beautiful—and her image accompanies an article about the importance of proper breathing techniques.⁶⁷



Figure 9. "La faiblesse du sexe féminin est une erreur." Photomechanical printed page from *Pour devenir belle... et le rester*.

With her perfectly upright posture and broad chest, Brada embodies respiratory health—an important element in Desbonnet's methodology as well as in Demeny's. She poses with her arms crossed high over her chest, and shading reveals the nuanced musculature in her forearms and biceps. This shading in Brada's neck, chin, and forearms has been very subtly enhanced, as have the outlines separating her smooth thighs and calves from the monochromatic studio backdrop. Brada's body is presented as having been conditioned by exercise, and her posing and subsequent framing make clear that her toned physique is notable and praiseworthy. Yet the extreme narrowness of her waist surpasses what even the most rigorous training regimen could deliver: this is a waist seemingly shaped by a corset.⁶⁸ But editing has made it possible for Brada to seem a healthy woman, fertile and desirable, as indicated by her hourglass physique, without the need for the kind of restrictive undergarment that Desbonnet claimed to have deplored.

Desbonnet's publications use other forms of framing to temper his presentation of Athléta's athleticism with examples of her more conventional femininity. In a 1910 issue of *La Culture Physique*, there is a three-page feature on the Athléta family and their home life. The pages combine photomechanical images, printed in poor visibility, with extensive text. The narrative recounts how the matriarch has retired after a successful career, leaving her daughters to continue her strength legacy. The author reminds readers that the three young women regularly perform feats of strength that would be impossible for the majority of men—members of the "stronger" sex. The writer admits that by 1910, more women have begun to follow structured strength programs, yet the Athléta family remain exceptional, and the matriarch is still the first woman to blend physical strength typically seen in men with feminine beauty.⁶⁹

At first glance, the imagery accompanying the article does not correspond to the written narrative. *La Culture Physique's* use of photomechanical imagery presents a decidedly domestic aspect of the elder athlete's public identity. Where the text praises the women's ability to transcend social beliefs about biological weakness, the images reinforce that the family still maintains traditional gender roles despite their athletic careers. Instead of relying on apparent overpainting, the article's images shift viewers' attention to the home and the way in which the eldest Athléta inhabits her domestic sphere. A photomechanical image of the matriarch at her retirement proper-

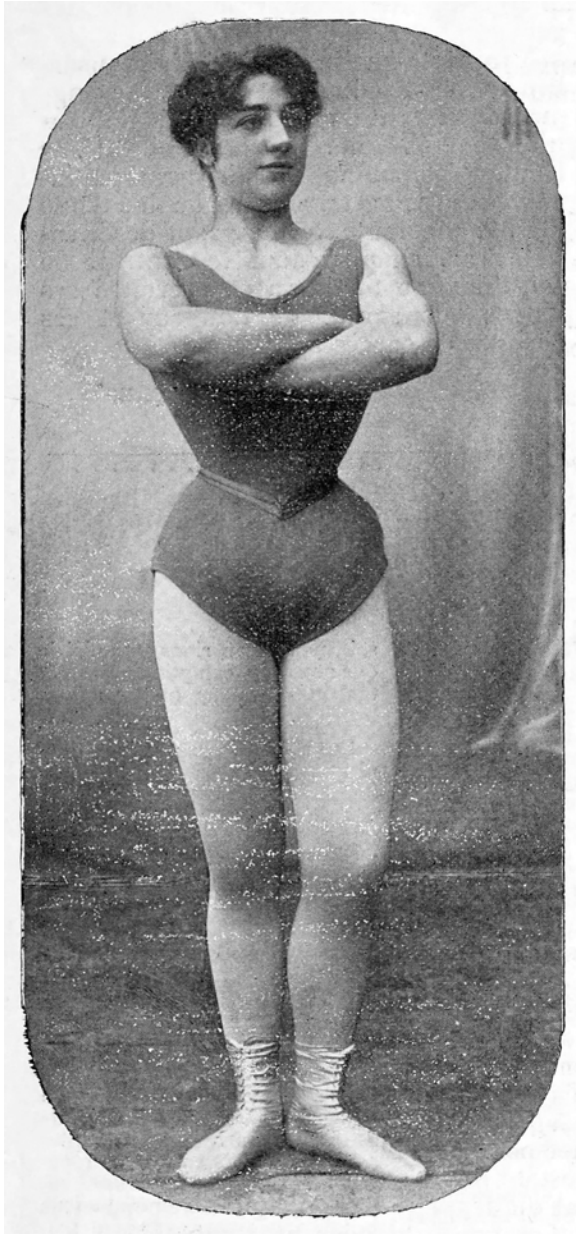


Figure 10. "Un athlète de 17 ans: Brada (la fille d'Athléta)," photomechanical image from *La Culture Physique* (February 1904).

ty in Saint-Nicolas with her husband (see figure 11) portrays the couple in a pleasant domestic setting. Athléta is dressed in a long dress typical of the period, fully covered from ankle to wrist to chin. In the second and third pages of this feature, readers are faced with representations of the culmination of Athléta's professional career: a comfortable abode, ample property, and a return to the kind of comportment and attire befitting a respectable mother and wife.⁷⁰ These image contrast starkly with the text surrounding them, which describes individual instances of Athléta's extraordinary performances.⁷¹ Regardless of the narrative presented in the text, images of Athléta's domestic life emphasize a theme that permeates Desbonnet's broader output: that women should prize motherhood above all else. Elsewhere in his publications, Desbonnet

used his own wife and daughter to indicate how robust internal health could be reflected on the outside, how youth could be preserved well into adulthood, and how a woman might pass her health onto her female offspring.⁷² Yet in this particular feature, Athléta is presented as the ideal woman for having used her training to best fulfill her biological role.

CONCLUSION

Physical culture for women involved a set of practices, representations, and associated behavior norms that differed significantly than those open to men. Scholars of visual culture have noted that female muscularity—visible, pronounced musculature—was something that many French commentators in the early twentieth century found repulsive and frightening, yet exotic and fascinating.⁷³ Desbonnet toed the line between the latter and former in part to attract viewers. He relied on the fact that muscularity was not a feature associated with respectable bourgeois womanhood. A woman who exhibited a sculpted physique exhibited signs of difference on her body: she might be a low-class performer, a hard laborer, or physical anomaly.⁷⁴ But above all else, a woman with more muscle mass than a typical bourgeois housewife—or at least the ideal *image* of a bourgeois housewife—risked signaling herself as masculine, and therefore a biological failure as a woman. Desbonnet believed that women could lift weights without losing their femininity. But his images are separate entities from live performances and are not true reflections of his models' physiques.⁷⁵ His images shape, temper, and soften his subjects.

Desbonnet's photographs can be grouped into two categories: publicity photos meant to attract and encourage clients, and inspirational images of professional athletes.⁷⁶ In both cases, images of women's bodies are molded using hand-made marks to surprise and please a viewer interested in physical culture yet conditioned by the period's gender norms. Retouching brings these objects further away from the subjects they are representing. They therefore reveal less about the photographed subject and more about Desbonnet's own values as a trainer attempting to market his schools and products, a pronatalist, a patriotic Frenchman, and an artist. Where a female athlete's body might betray signs of developed musculature at the expense of feminine curvature, an overpainter can readjust the balance between the two poles, creating a harmonious image and body that Desbonnet's potential customers could themselves hope to achieve. Overpainting directs attention away from the transgressive possibilities offered by this muscular female body. Desbonnet's female models demonstrate what it might look like for a muscular woman to participate in Republican French society, using her physical and moral strength to repopulate the nation. While Desbonnet encouraged women to lift weights and to not fear excessive musculature, challenging conventional beliefs that women were inherently weaker than men, he used overpainting to make his models' bodies fall closer in line to conventional feminine standards and champion gender dimorphism.



Figure 11. Photomechanical excerpt from Ozalga, "Une famille de femmes athlètes. Athlète et ses filles," *La Culture Physique* (15 May 1910), 311.

NOTES:

1. Philippe Campillo and Alessandro Porrovecchio, "La conception de la beauté corporelle dans *La Culture Physique*: La recherche de l'idéal antique," *Staps* 119 (2018), 11-25, and *Accord à corps*, ed. Gilbert Andrieu (Paris: Éditions Créphis, 1993).
2. Edmond Desbonnet, *Pour devenir belle...et le rester. Manuel de culture physique pour les femmes* (Paris: Librairie Athlétique, 1911), 1.
3. Desbonnet's *La Culture Physique* was a bi-monthly magazine and ran from 1904 until 1962, with gaps in publication from 1905 to 1906, and again from 1915 to 1925. The magazine absorbed the periodicals *La Beauté par la santé*, *La Santé par la beauté*, *Santé-beauté*, and *L'Athlète*. In 1963, *La Culture Physique* rebranded as *Santé-beauté et culture physique réunies*, lasting until 1970. In the magazine's first issue, the editors explain their goal: to produce a publication exclusively targeted at men who want to achieve physical harmony. Part of this project entailed locating never-before-seen photographs to demonstrate to readers what aspirational bodies can look like, all in the service of helping readers become beautiful and strong. See La Rédaction, "Notre but," *La Culture Physique* 1 (February 1904): 2.
4. Florence Carpentier makes clear the importance of attending to the many iterations of feminisms in the early twentieth century. It is not possible to consider Desbonnet to be fully progressive, or a "feminist," and it is too simplistic to consider him to be entirely socially conservative. Some proponents in this period of more rigorous female physical activity still argued

that women should practice sport for reproductive and patriotic ends. See Florence Carpentier, "Alice Milliat et le premier 'sport féminin' dans l'entre-deux-geures," *20&21. Revue d'histoire* 142, 2 (2019): 93-107.

5. I use Tom Gretton's definition of photomechanical as any printmaking process "in which a photographic image is used to produce a relief, intaglio, or planographic printing surface, in order to make adequate copies of the photographic image of a printing press, rather than by exposing and developing photosensitive paper." See Tom Gretton, "Signs for Labour-Value in Printed Pictures after the Photomechanical Revolution: Mainstream Changes and Extreme Cases around 1900," *Oxford Art Journal* 28, no. 3 (2005): 376.

6. Christine Bard has made clear how crucial clothing and other forms of styling have historically been in revealing markers of gender difference while masking signs of sex. See Christine Bard, *Une histoire politique du pantalon* (Paris: Seuil, 2010).

7. There is a rich body of scholarship on the different schools of French physical culture in the period between 1870 and 1914 and on the period's fascination with relationships between bodily form and function. See, for example, Sylvain Villaret and Jean-Michel Delaplace, "La Méthode naturelle de Georges Hébert ou l'école naturiste en école physique (1900-1939)," *Staps* 63, 1 (2004); Jacques Gleyse, "De l'art de la gymnastique (1569) au culturisme et aux premières compétitions organisées (1904). L'émergence du *bodybuilding*?" *Staps* 1, 119 (2018): 27-45; Alain Corbin, Jean-Jacques Courtine and Georges Vigarello, *Histoire de la virilité*, vol. 2 (Paris: Seuil, 2011); Thierry Arnal, "Science et seduction du nouveau corps athlétique: à l'origine du sport en France," *Revue d'histoire du XIXe siècle* 56, 1 (2018); Georges L. Mosse, *L'Image de l'homme. L'invention de la virilité moderne* (Paris: Agora Pocket, 1996).

8. Natalia Bazoge, "La gymnastique d'entretien au XXe siècle: d'une valorisation de la masculinité hégémonique à l'expression d'un féminisme en action," *Clio. Histoire, femmes et sociétés* 23 (2006): 197-208.

9. Georges Vigarello, Alain Corbin, and Jean-Jacques Courtine, *Histoire du corps* vol. 2 (Paris: Seuil, 2005), 8-9, 332. For a more discussion of Republican gymnastics in this period, see Patrick Clastres, "Gymnastique, sport et nation (1870-1914)," in *Sport, société et culture en France: du XIXe siècle à nos jours*, ed. Paul Dietschy and Patrick Clastres (Paris: Hachette, 2006).

10. See, for example, Mike Huggins and Mike O'Mahony, "Prologue: Extending the Study of the Visual in the History of Sport," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 28, 8-9 (2011), 1089-1104, and Françoise Bosman, Patrick Clastres, and Paul Dietschy, *Images du sport: de l'archive à l'histoire* (Paris: Nouveau monde, 2010). The latter make clear the importance of situating objects and images with their conditions of production in mind.

11. Mary Lynn Stewart defines physical culture for women in the interwar period as "comprising personal hygiene, deportment, exercise, and beauty regimens" in Mary Lynn Stewart, *For Health and Beauty: Physical Culture for Frenchwomen, 1880s-1930s* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001). This definition applies to both men and women in the 1870-1914 period. See also Tamar Garb, *Bodies of Modernity: Figure and Flesh in Fin-de-siècle France* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998); Christopher Forth and Ian Crozier, *Body Parts: Critical Explorations in Corporeality* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005); Joan Tumblety, *Remaking the Male Body: Masculinity and the Uses of Physical Culture in Interwar and Vichy France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

12. See Andrieu, *Accord à corps: Edmond Desbonnet et La Culture Physique*; Bernard Andrieu, *Ma gymnastique des organes* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2014); and Peta Tait, *Circus Bodies: Cultural Identity in aerial performance* (London: Routledge, 2005).

13. Because Desbonnet's method was inherently commercial, it could not be accessible to everyone. Though his publications extended his ideas beyond the walls of his gyms and personal training, his product was still relegated to middle-class and upper-class patrons. See Bazoge, 197-208.

14. See Gilbert Andrieu, "Le nu au service de la santé", *Tréma*, 8 (1995), 3–14; Campillo and Porrovecchio; Martine Lavaud, "Les Amazones du sport sous la Troisième République," *Muse-Medusa* 7 (2019); Gilbert Andrieu, *L'homme et la force: une histoire de la force à travers des pratiques corporelles commercialisées au XIXe et au XXe siècles* (Paris: Paris 5, 1987); Bernard Andrieu, *Ma gymnastique des organes*; Gilbert Andrieu, *Accord à corps: Edmond Desbonnet et La Culture Physique*; Christopher Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).
15. André Gunthert and Thierry Gervais have demonstrated how prevalent photomechanical retouching in the French illustrated press was from photography's earliest appearances in periodicals. See Thierry Gervais, *L'illustration photographique. Naissance du spectacle de l'information, 1843-1914* (Paris: École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2007) and André Gunthert, "'Sans retouche'. Histoire d'un mythe photographique," *Études photographiques* 22 (2008).
16. Desbonnet, *Pour devenir belle*, 59.
17. Elisa Camiscioli, *Reproducing the French Race: Immigration, Intimacy, and Embodiment in the Early Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 16.
18. Lavaud Garb also writes that at the turn of the century, masculine women or feminine men represented unnatural aberrations to the social order, which was based on visible distinctions. See Garb, 11.
19. Other French physical culturists in this period such as Georges Hébert, Dr. Rouhet, and Albert Surier also encouraged women to explore their physical potential. See Vigarello, Corbin, Courtine, *Histoire du corps* vol. 2.
20. Ernest Weber, for example, believed that aesthetics ran counter to health concerns. See Ernest Weber, *Sports Athlétiques* (Paris: Garnier Frères, Libraires-Éditeurs, 1905), 2.
21. Hébert in particular worried at length that excess strength training, and too much focus on specialized training, might make a woman too muscular, and therefore unbalanced. See Georges Hébert, *L'Éducation physique féminine. Muscle et beauté plastique* (Paris: Librairie Vuilbert, 1919), 36.
22. According to Mary Lynn Stewart, this standard endured from the mid-1880s until 1908, when popular French fashion designers began to do away with the corset. While high fashion moved away from the hourglass shape, slimness remained desirable. See Mary Lynn Stewart, "Slimming the Female Body? Re-evaluating Dress, Corsets, and Physical Culture in France, 1890s-1930s," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 5, no. 2 (June 2001): 177.
23. Stewart, *For Health and Beauty*, 18.
24. For an overview of female physical culture and sport ideologies in late nineteenth and early twentieth century France, see Georges Vigarello, *Le Corps redressé. Histoire d'un pouvoir pédagogique* (Paris: Éditions universitaires, 1978); Laurent Guido and Gianni Haver, *La Femme sportive: L'enjeu des images* (Chêne-Bourg: Georg, 2003); Catherine Louveau, "Inégalité sur la ligne de départ: femmes, origines sociales et conquête du sport," *Clio. Histoire, femmes et sociétés* 23 (2006); Nancy Théberge, "Sport, caractère physique et différenciation sexuelle," *Sociologie et sociétés* 27, 1 (Spring 1995).
25. Stewart, "Slimming the Female Body," 186.
26. Jennifer Hargreaves, "Introducing Heroines of Sport: Making Sense of Difference and Identity," in *Heroines of Sport: The Politics of Difference and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2000), 2. See also Louveau.
27. Jean-Claude Bussard, "Gymnastique scolaire et représentation du corps féminin: les manuels suisses d'éducation physique du XIXe siècle et du début du XXe siècle," in *Images de la femme sportive aux XIXe et XXe siècles*, ed. Laurent Guido and Gianni Haver (Geneva: Georg Editeur, M&H, 2003), 197.
28. Georges Vigarello, *Les métamorphoses du gras. Histoire de l'obésité* (Paris: Seuil, 2010), 145.
29. Hébert's publications, such as *La Méthode Naturelle*, published in 1907, and *Muscle et Beauté*, 1919, championed the idea that women could perform the same physical activities as men. However, his method relied on natural systems of movement performed in nature, such as running, walking, jumping, and climbing. Desbonnet's method involved targeted and personalized weight training in addition to these types of movements. After the First World War, Hébert's female models became more muscular. See Jean-Michel Delaplace, *Georges Hébert: Sculpteur de Corps* (Paris: Vuilbert, 2005), 210-218, 298.
30. Laurent Guido, Gianni Haver, and Rachel Noel, *La Mise-en-scène du corps sportif: de la Belle Époque à l'âge des extrêmes* (Lausanne: Musée Olympique, 2002), 32.
31. Desbonnet writes, "ceci tout simplement: c'est que nous autres modernes, nous ne nous faisons nullement le meme idéal de l'athlète que les Grecs," in Edmond Desbonnet, *Comment on devient athlète* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1911), 51. For more on explorations of male virility, physical beauty, and athletes' bodies, see Arnal.
32. Campillo and Porrovecchio, 11-25.
33. Ibid.
34. Gilbert Andrieu, *Force et beauté*, 14. See also Christian Pociello, "Georges Demeny (1850-1917)" in *Le Corps et le mouvement. Précurseurs et pionniers de l'éducation physique* (Toulouse: Éditions privat, 1981).
35. Andrieu, *Force et beauté*, see also Lix Ruxol, *Beauté santé plastique: Hygiène de la femme* (Montluçon: Grande imprimerie du centre, 1913) as an example of a methodology for women that encouraged fragility and delicacy.
36. Vigarello, *Les métamorphoses du gras*, 153.
37. Campillo and Porrovecchio, 11-25.
38. Desbonnet writes, "La beauté éclate aux yeux et les éblouit; elle est la manifestation extérieure de la perfection physique, à laquelle on est enclin d'attribuer tous les dons de l'intelligence et tous les tendres sentiments du coeur," in his *Pour devenir belle*, 3.
39. Desbonnet's were not the only physical culture publications from this period that reflect a palpable panic about the decline of both the average French body and of French social acceptance of what bodies should look like. In Pierre Loti's preface to the 1911 *Comment on devient athlète*, the military officer and writer laments the fact that cultural acceptance of "morbid ugliness" has invaded French society to the point that all levels of visual culture—from illustrated journals to contemporary paintings—reflect deplorably unhealthy human forms. Loti writes that most French bodies look emaciated and deathly, and are far from the ideals established by classical beauty. Loti is frustrated by the fact that most people do not even recognize as monstrous the bodies they encounter most often. He praises Desbonnet for offering respite from this onslaught of ugliness in the form of photographed classical beauty. For Loti, Desbonnet's subjects, clearly visible in photomechanical form, prove that human bodies can be restored to their harmonious, ideal state, and that French society will benefit from the individual's renewal. See Pierre Loti, "Preface," to Edmond Desbonnet, *Comment on devient athlète*, 3rd edition (Paris: Librairie Athlétique, 1911), ix.
40. The leotard was named after French gymnast Jules Léotard (1838-1870).
41. Lyneise Williams makes clear how crucial printing processes are for constructing ideas about subjects' identities and social roles. See Lyneise Williams, *Latin Blackness in Parisian Visual Culture, 1852-1932* (New York: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2019). For technical discussions of the halftone process, see Jacob Kainen, "The Development of the Halftone Screen," *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1951), 409. See also Anne-Claude Ambroise-Rendu, "Du dessin de presse à la photographie (1878-1914): Histoire d'une mutation technique et culturelle," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 39, 1 (Jan-March 1992) and Thierry Gervais' pioneering dissertation, *L'illustration photographique. Naissance du spectacle d'information (1843-1914)*.
42. Gianni Haver, *La presse illustrée: une histoire romande* (Lausanne: Savoir suisse: Presses polytechniques, 2018), 49.

43. Gilbert Andrieu, "Introduction," *Accord à corps: Edmond Desbonnet et la culture physique*, 7-8.
44. Gunthert, 2.
45. Heinz and Bridget A. Hensch, *The Painted Photograph, 1839-1914: Origins, Techniques, Aspirations* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 13-15.
46. *Ibid.*, 15.
47. Gunthert writes that "good" retouching was synonymous with invisible retouching. A successful overpainter would have been able to mask all evidence of his work. See Gunthert, 3.
48. Catherine Hindson, *Female Performance Practice on the Fin-de-siècle Popular Stage of London and Paris: Experiment and Advertisement* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 3.
49. In 1911, Desbonnet proposed a tripartite definition of "athlete" that differs from contemporary understandings of the term. An athlete, the trainer claims, is not a Herculean figure, nor a colossus of epic musculature. An athlete is not simply an individual capable of individual physical feats required for a specific sport. While such people might possess admirable athletic skills, they do not encapsulate athletic perfection. The "athlete" that Desbonnet, his methods, and his peers seek to celebrate and promote, and to impress upon readers is at once strong, beautiful, and healthy. The "strength" requirement demands that individuals develop themselves to their fullest potential. In doing so, the subject will necessarily become visually beautiful, for someone who has taken care to build his physical form properly will "always" appear pleasing to the eye. Finally, Desbonnet stresses the notion that well-rounded muscular strength and its associated visual manifestations (symmetry, upright posture, and healthy complexions, among other attributes) will inevitably lead to good health. These were values that applied to men and women—both should strive for strength, health, and their associated physical manifestations. Yet for women, these attributes had the added bonus of further impacting French national health. See Desbonnet, *Comment on devient athlète*, 31-32.
50. Hindson, 37-38.
51. Anthea Callen, *The Spectacular Body: Science, Method and Meaning in the Work of Degas* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 20-21; 61-62.
52. Lavaud.
53. Desbonnet writes that "Les femmes confondent presque toujours les exercices et les sports athlétiques avec la culture physique, comme elles confondent toujours force et grosseur." *Pour devenir belle*, 60.
54. *Ibid.*, 62.
55. These images are uncredited, yet their diversity of printing quality suggests that they come from Desbonnet's own extensive image collection, rather than having been taken by the author himself.
56. Desbonnet writes "La force, c'est la santé. La santé parfaite est le résultat des bonnes fonctions des organes," *Pour devenir belle*, 60.
57. Gunthert.
58. Betty Lefèvre writes that Desbonnet's images of female models serve to assuage viewers that physical culture has altered nothing about conventional femininity. See Betty Lefèvre, "La modernité de l'héritage d'Edmond Desbonnet" in *Accord à corps: Edmond Desbonnet et la culture physique*, 52.
59. Jacques Defrance, "L'Ambivalence du corps culturiste," in *Accords à corps: Edmond Desbonnet et la culture physique*, 69.
60. Claude Conyers writes that courtesans were featured in Desbonnet's publications, including in *Pour devenir belle*, for possessing desirable physical features. Caroline Otero was one such model-courtesan, who also performed at the Parisian Cirque d'Été, and was praised for her hourglass physique. See Claude Conyers, "Courtesans in Dance History: Les Belles de la Belle Époque," *Dance Chronicle* 26, no. 2 (2003): 220-222. Andrieu, *Force et beauté*, 18-19. Andrieu also writes of how the nude form was used as a pedagogical sign of natural good health in late nineteenth century France. See Gilbert Andrieu, "La nude au service de la santé," 3-14.
61. Richard Holt, "Women, Men and Sport in France, c. 1870-1914: An Introductory Survey," *Journal of Sport History* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 122. Joan Tumblety writes that bourgeois readers of sports and physical culture magazines in this period were encouraged to emulate the bodies of working-class sportsmen, while maintaining a sense of class distinction. See Tumblety, 114.
62. Athléta and other muscular female models are styled and edited in ways that recall idealized Republican gymnasts, with nipped waists, extended busts, and angular shoulders, albeit with more pronounced musculature. See Vigarello, Corbin, and Courtine, *Histoire du corps*, 371.
63. Lavaud. Gilbert Andrieu writes that spectatorship of strength activity was a middle-class activity in the nineteenth century. See Andrieu's *L'homme et la force: une histoire de la force à travers des pratiques corporelles commercialisées au XIXe et au XXe siècles*.
64. Desbonnet's personal correspondence with the Athléta family suggests that they maintained a friendly relationship beginning at least as early as 1897. Letters from the Athléta matriarch and her daughters to Desbonnet indicate that the women promoted Desbonnet's methods and publications while they traveled and performed across France. He seems to have provided promotional support and friendly encouragement to the women. It remains unclear, however, if the Athléta family received financial support from Desbonnet for being featured in his publications.
65. Fae Brauer, *Eroticizing Lamarckian Eugenics: The Body Stripped Bare During French Sexual Renegotiation* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 109.
66. Desbonnet, *Pour devenir belle*, 49-51.
67. A. Jenkins, "L'Art de respirer," *La Culture Physique: Revue mensuelle illustrée, étude documentaire du développement musculaire rationnel par les sports* 1, no. 1 (February 1904): 13.
68. The Athléta women pose without corsets in Desbonnet's publications, reflecting Desbonnet's claims that his methods could help free women from the social constraints of shape-wear while preserving their procreative potential. See Brauer, 112.
69. Ozalga, "Une famille de femmes athlètes. Athléta et ses filles," *La Culture Physique* 129 (15 February 1910): 310.
70. Athléta is regularly praised in Desbonnet's publications as being such a strong mother that she transmitted her strength to her daughters at the moment of conception. See Ozalga, 310 and Brauer, 112.
71. *Ibid.*, 311-312.
72. Desbonnet began his daughter Marguerite's training at a very young age. There is an image of her as a five-year-old lifting weights in the September 1904 issue of *La Culture Physique*. As a teenager, his daughter demonstrated how internal health is reflected by outward appearance on page 117 of Desbonnet, *Pour devenir belle*. John C. Grimek wrote of how Madame Desbonnet appeared younger than her 75 years in 1950. See John C. Grimek, "My Visit to Desbonnet," *Strength and Health* (February 1950).
73. James Smalls writes of how muscularity in women was a physical feature that could combine with other markers of difference to provoke repulsion and attraction in circus audiences. See James Smalls, "'Race' as Spectacle in Late-Nineteenth-Century French Art and popular Culture," *French Historical Studies* 26, 3 (Spring 2003), 371.
74. *Ibid.*, 371.
75. Peta Tait makes clear that we cannot conflate performance with photographic accounts. See Tait, 6-7.
76. Gilbert Andrieu, *Force et Beauté* (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 1992), 16. Jacques Defrance writes that Desbonnet's photography served a technical and pedagogical role, giving practitioners clear criteria for comparison. See Defrance, 61.