

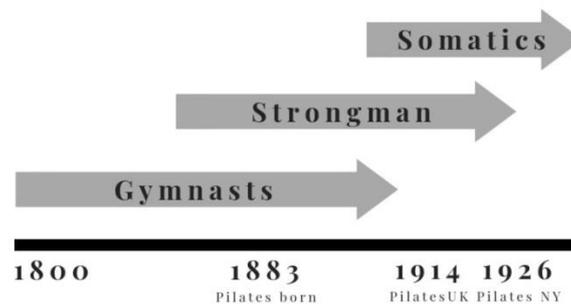
Joseph Pilates and the Physical Culture Movement

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1. The Physical Culture Movement

The Physical Culture Movement was a health and fitness movement that began in Europe during the early 1800's and having spread to England and the United states it reached its peak around the late 1800's/early 1900's (McKenzie, 2013). There were essentially three 'waves' to the Physical Culture Movement: the European Gymnasts, the Strongman athletes and the Somatics.



2. Joe Pilates travels through the Physical Culture Movement

European Gymnast Physical Culturists (Pilates is in Germany)

The German Turner movement began in the early 1800's and was a presence in European Gymnast Physical Culture. Turnverein clubs played an important social/cultural/political role in liberal 'freethinking' German society (Pfister, 2009). We know that Pilates was likely exposed to a Turner environment during his formative years. Records from 1892 indicate his Father was equipment manager for the 'Turnverein Eintracht' (Harmony/Concord club) in Mönchengladbach. Pilates was nine at this time, however his family had been living on the same street as the club as early as 1886 (Pont & Romero, 2013).

Strongman Physical Culturists (Pilates is in England, 1914)

Eugen Sandow (1867-1925) was Europe's most famous Strongman Physical Culturist; he was born in East Prussia (Germany) and founded the sport of bodybuilding. Beginning in the late 1800's he toured a Strongman act around Europe, this involved posing in a fig leaf as a living recreation of Greek sculptures (Drane, 2015).

A big part of the Pilates folklore is his experience working in the circus performing as a living Greek statue, the similarity between Pilates and Sandow's experience is uncanny. Also a lifelong friend of Pilates, August Benkert whom he met when they were interned during World War One, indicates that their friendship began because of shared admiration for Sandow (Pont & Romero, 2013).

Somatic Physical Culturists (Pilates is in New York, 1926 onwards)

François Delsarte was a French performer who developed a Somatic Physical Culture system that connected the emotional inner experience of the actor with a systematised set of gestures; Rudolf von Laban and Matthias Alexander are said to have studied the Delsarte method. In 1885 a book titled 'The Delsarte System of Expression' was published and it's said Pilates kept a copy of this book at his New York studio (Pont & Romero, 2013).

Dr Bess Mensendieck was a Dutch American medical doctor, who found Delsarte's methods too metaphysical and evolved the ideas in a more gymnastic/callisthenic direction. She published multiple books on her system and between 1905 and 1924 schools for the Mensendieck System of Functional Exercise were established in Europe and the United States: at its peak there were 200 000 students at her schools (Veder, 2011). We also know Pilates kept Mensendieck's address at his New York studio (Pont & Romero, 2013).

'Following these stories we see a real picture emerging of Europeans taking their various Physical Culture systems around the world. Some of Pilates connections with these people and organisations are educated speculation and some of them are very real.'

3. Joe Pilates and Physical Culture?

Culture

One of the most interesting parts of the Physical Culture Movement is use of the term 'Culture'. Using the term expands the movement beyond just moving/strengthening bodies and in to subject areas such as society, customs and the creative arts. The largest cultural influence on the beginnings of the Physical Culture Movement was the Romanticism period (Pfister, 2003). At its peak from approximately 1800 to 1850 and as a counter to the Industrial Revolution, the Romantics were interested in the beauty of nature (Cunningham & Jardine, 1990).

Pilates' ideas mirror Romantic thinking about the Industrial Revolution when he introduces the first chapter of his book titled 'Return to Life' with the heading "CIVILIZATION IMPAIRS PHYSICAL FITNESS" (Pilates & Miller, 1945 p.6).

Self-care or Whole-body health

In the 1870's as a response to the presence of tuberculosis, hygiene was taught in many European schools (Pont & Romero, 2013). These classes covered topics such as the importance of breathing fresh air, good sleep habits, nutrition and bathing. Many of these ideas made their way in to Physical Culture. The Swedish Gymnastics text titled 'An Exposition of the Swedish Movement-Cure' (Taylor, 1860) has a chapter titled 'Temperature – Physiological Effect of Cold and Heat' (p.368) and gives descriptions of various forms of bathing and their health benefits. The same chapter also gives instructions for a process called the 'Air Bath', this involved 'rubbing or brushing the body's surface to bend, stretch and refresh the skin'. Pilates was a strong advocate for hygiene, he tells us in his book 'Your Health' (Pilates, 1934),

"Much of the child's welfare depends upon the cleanliness of the skin. Water should be freely used. Hot shower baths followed by gradually cooler and cooler

temperature until the water is cold, has a most beneficial and exhilarating effect, especially when the body is briskly “massaged” (at the beginning) with a soft brush to be later discarded for a harder one.” (p.45-46).

Another approach to whole-body health embraced by Physical Culture was the benefits of fresh air and spending time in nature. These ideas were derived from Romantic thinking about the unnaturalness of the modern world (Cunningham & Jardine, 1990) and by a desire to return to the Ancient Greek aesthetic of wearing limited, loose fitting clothing and the health benefits of exposing as much skin as possible to fresh air (Pont & Romero, 2013). Strongman Physical culturist J.P. Müller was an advocate for these ideas writing books titled ‘The Fresh-Air Book’ (Müller, 1908) and ‘My Sun-Bathing and Fresh-Air System’ (Müller, 1921).

Pilates makes his feelings on the topic known in, ‘Your Health’ (Pilates, 1934),

“The mode of living prevalent amongst the ancient Greeks was, of course entirely different from that of today. These people were nature-lovers. They preferred to commune with the very elements of nature itself – the woods, the streams, the rivers, the winds and the sea. All these were natural music, poems and dramas to these Greeks who were so fond of outdoor life.” (p.38).

Mind Body

Physical Culturists were of the opinion that the Ancient Greeks represented the perfect civilisation because of their Mind Body ideals. Strongman Physical Culturist Eugen Sandow would often speak of the ‘Grecian ideal’ (Drane, 2015; Veder, 2011) and when describing good workout habits in his book titled, ‘Strength and How To Obtain It’ (Sandow, 1897) he states,

“It is the brain which develops the muscles” (p.13).

Pilates shares similar beliefs when he says in ‘Return to Life’ (Pilates & Miller, 1945),

“Contrology begins with mind control over muscles. “(p.10).

‘When we examine Pilates movements and his writing it becomes apparent that he was exposed to thinking derived from Physical Culture.’

4. Movement class



Fig. 72. Beinwechsel in der Rückenlage. Beide Knie sollen durchgedrückt sein. XVI.



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The German Turnverein Movement had an influence on Joseph Pilates and the development of his method. The German Turnverein Movement. Known as the "father of gymnastics" (Turnvater in German) Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (August 11, 1778 – October 15, 1852) was a gymnastics educator and a fervent nationalist interested in a united state of Germany. These Germans did not introduce Americans to the concept of physical culture, but they played a crucial role in popularizing physical development and the cultivation of health between the 1880s and the 1920s (McKenzie 2013). Especially during the late 1800s among universities, and the general population, there was a new emphasis put on a muscular, active male body. Here Pilates reflects common physical culture wisdom, gaining more from a few energetic efforts than from many listless ones. The goal is for this precision to eventually become second nature and carry over into everyday life as grace and economy of movement. C. Joseph Pilates accompanied his method with a variety of equipment, for which he used the term "apparatus". Each apparatus was designed to help accelerate the process of stretching, strengthening, body alignment and increased core strength started by the mat work. The best-known and most popular apparatus today, the Reformer, ... Pilates attempts to properly coordinate this breathing practice with movement. Specifically, people have cited Joseph Pilates, the man behind the Pilates school of training as the inventor of the plank. Unlike modern iterations, which valorise the amount of time held in this position, Pilates supposedly used the exercise for reps and strength as opposed to endurance. Both Pilates and the Burpee continued to be used but we were a long way from the "Core" craze which seemed to hold the plank exercise at its forefront. What happened? Enter Stuart McGill. I combined squats and deadlifts with other larger movements for the posterior chain alongside strict abdominal work. This has improved my strength far more than planks ever did. At the end of the day, or workout I suppose, it comes down to what are your goals and how useful the exercise is.