



OXFORD JOURNALS  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Source: *History Workshop*, No. 30 (Autumn, 1990), pp. 22-54

Published by: Oxford University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4289005>

Accessed: 17-01-2017 13:32 UTC

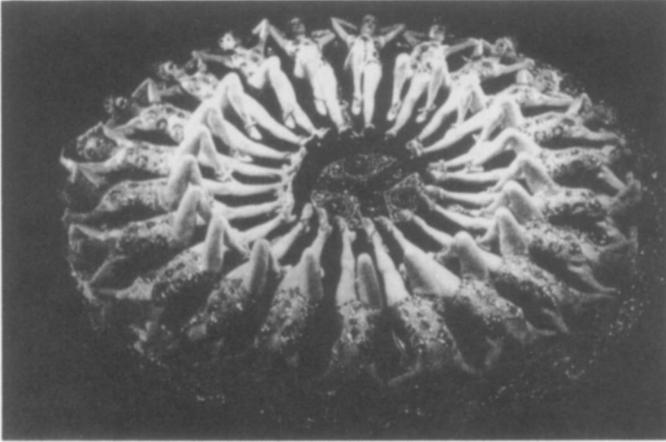
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Forbes, *Women of All Lands* (see n. 63), p. 472

Bal Taborin, Paris 1938

## They had Such a Lot of Fun: The Women's League of Health and Beauty Between the Wars by Jill Julius Matthews

*In the 1930s . . . the nation's womanhood was swept off its feet by 'Keep Fit' and the Women's League of Health and Beauty . . . The Swedish gymnasts [were troubled]:*

*It is you gymnasts, you educationally-trained gymnasts, who can save this reckless and uneducated enthusiasm for something real, something genuine, something fine. If you desert your own training . . . to run with the pack, you will be no better than the pack.*

*One cannot help feeling that 'the pack' in her [Dr Anna Broman's] eyes, meant girls who went 'slobbering along the road with young men', for she regards 'Keep Fit' and the like as playing for 'sex appeal, for beauty or slimness'.<sup>1</sup>*

*By December 1935, the [Central] Council [of Recreative Physical Training] consisted of representatives of 82 national bodies and 34 individual members. The national bodies fell into three main categories: (1) those concerned exclusively with physical activity, like the governing bodies of sport and those promoting dancing and keep-fit work (whatever happened to the Legion of Health and Happiness?) . . .<sup>2</sup>*

Young British women in the 1930s with reckless enthusiasm, who went slobbering, who ran in packs. Young women who kept themselves fit by

joining groups with such ludicrously precious names – the Women's League of Health and Beauty, the Legion of Health and Happiness – at a time when the League of Nations was battling for significance, and the fascist legions were massing in Berlin and Rome. Ignorant young women playing as jolly farce the tragedies of the world stage. My imagination is set coursing by these improbable, evanescent phrases.

I had for some time been seeking ways of investigating and interpreting the lives of women outside the standard formulations of respectability and responsibility, beyond victimhood, collusion and resistance. Without detracting from an understanding of the systemic subordination and oppression of women, I was looking for the moments of escape, of autonomy, of excess; I wanted to find moments when women took pleasure in themselves, when they had fun. Which is why I pounced upon the leagues and legions of uneducated slobbering girls seeking health and beauty and happiness. The commentators' tones of outrage and mockery indicated that something female was here slipping through the meshes of respectability. . . .

The term 'keep-fit' seems first to have been used in about 1929, in relation to a campaign in the north of England, sponsored by the National Council of Girls' Clubs to cater on a large scale for the physical exercise needs of working girls.<sup>3</sup> But as a mass movement it began in 1930 in London in an organization called The Women's League of Health and Beauty, a self-supporting commercial enterprise established by Mary Bagot Stack. This organization still exists today as a limited company<sup>4</sup> with about 20,000 members in the United Kingdom, Canada, Ireland, South Africa, Zimbabwe and New Zealand. (An Australian branch, founded in 1935, died out in the mid-1970s.) However, the heyday of the League was the decade of the 1930s. On the eve of the second world war, the League boasted a membership of about 170,000 women in Britain, Australia, Canada and Hong Kong. It considered itself not just an exercise association but some sort of feminist organization dedicated to peace.

The founder of the League, Mary (Mollie) Bagot Stack, was born into the protestant ascendancy in Dublin in 1883.<sup>5</sup> She had the standard sickly childhood of the health reformer and in 1907 entered Mrs Josef Conn's Institute of Physical Training in London. Mrs Conn taught a system of remedial exercises that Mollie claimed was based on 'the scientific system of Health Building invented by Sir Frederick McCoy, M.D., K.C.M.G., Senior Professor of the Melbourne University, a scientific and original thinker'.<sup>6</sup> In that same year, 1907, Mrs Conn published her exhortatory pamphlet, *Let There Be Light, Mothers!* which presented her views on the necessity for girls' education to fit them properly to become the mothers of the race: educated to become rocks 'of wisdom and strength', their bodies and minds 'trained as fitting receptacles and guides for the bodies and minds which are to follow'.<sup>7</sup> The McCoy-Conn system of physical education was thus one of the few at the time designed specifically for women, to conduce to successful childbearing and rearing.<sup>8</sup>

Mollie Stack became fascinated with the system, and learnt well Mrs Conn's message of the light of education. She soon went forth to kindle that light herself: 'Training which makes motherhood safe and easy, and childhood healthy, is racial, and surely every woman who wants to know about it should be given the opportunity'.<sup>9</sup> Beginning as a tutor on Mrs Conn's staff in London, after a year she moved to Manchester where she treated individual patients and taught private classes. She then branched out, and set up large classes for factory girls. But after a year in Manchester, now aged 28, she married,<sup>10</sup> left her career and followed her husband to India.

A child was born, but died almost immediately. In terms of the hagiography that the League would later develop, 'it is important to emphasise that M. had no control over [the circumstances of the baby's death]'.<sup>11</sup> In 1914, a second child was born, 'quick[ly] and absolutely painless[ly]'.<sup>12</sup> Always something of a visionary, Mollie Stack wrote in 1931:

when my child was born a girl, I felt certain that the Truth and Beauty of Nature and Human Nature were going to be linked up and expressed by means of her physique – some day – somehow . . .<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, by the late 1930s her daughter Prunella was widely known as Britain's 'Perfect Girl'.

Mollie Stack's husband was killed in France in the early months of the war, and Mollie and Prunella returned to England. By 1920, to support herself and family, she began holding small classes in her home, teaching a select clientele, developing a society reputation.<sup>14</sup> In 1926, with the help of Marjorie Duncombe, a graduate of the Ginner-Mawer School,<sup>15</sup> she set up her own school to train teachers, The Bagot Stack Health School. The School taught what seems to have been a fairly orthodox combination of dance, callisthenics and remedial exercise, but Mollie Stack was also developing her own exercise system, incorporating more exercises for graceful walking and figure training.<sup>16</sup> She advertised her services by what also seem to have been fairly orthodox methods – private lecture-demonstrations, charity performances, word of mouth – but she was also attracting a wider interest through an impressive publicity machine. Her first major public performance at the Comedy Theatre in 1926<sup>17</sup> was photographed by *The Times* and the pictures given wide distribution;<sup>18</sup> from 1928 on she wrote series of weekly exercise columns in the London press;<sup>19</sup> she made herself newsworthy:

Fairies . . . and How They are Fashioned. Arcady in a London Ballroom. 'Imagine You are a Falling Leaf' . . . At other times Mrs Bagot Stack and her teachers take their individual pupils. There have been a number of children among them who have many times been singled out in society for

their grace and charm: the Duchess of Rutland's girls, the Ladies Ursula and Isobel Manners, Lady Anglesey's pretty children; and, among the ones a little older, Lady Joan Talbot.

And then, at the end of the day, Mrs Bagot Stack goes to a big London store and there trains the work girls by the same system, in a rest room in which they all collect, after their day's work, for sheer delight in the training.<sup>20</sup>

Mollie Stack had become a conservative reformer and philanthropist with a missionary zeal to brighten the world with the light of maternal health education. In 1930 she took her big step, away from the select private classes and away, too, from the special charity classes (though both would remain as peripheral activities throughout her career). She founded the Build-the-Body-Beautiful League, soon changed to The Women's League of Health and Beauty, initially dubbed by the press the Sixpenny Health Movement. It was designed 'for business girls and busy women to enable them to conserve and improve their physique. It started in the firm belief that pride of body is an essential foundation on which to build life and character.'<sup>21</sup>

The League's stated aim was 'Racial Health', later changed, in 1936, to the more explicit 'Racial Health Leading to Peace'.<sup>22</sup> The term 'racial', in the 1930s, was, of course, an ambiguous one and the League packed several meanings into its use. In its primary meaning, 'racial' was a synonym for 'maternal', with a connotation of 'the human race': a non-specific concern with the health of future generations. It could, however, shrink back to 'the British race' or incorporate bits of Europe and the Empire. There was no suggestion of Aryan or white superiority in the League's use of the term, nor was it racially discriminatory in practice (a fact of special importance when a League centre was established in Hong Kong in the late 1930s, and even more so, after the war, when Prunella established a centre in Cape Town and brought a racially mixed team to England for the Coronation Display in 1953).<sup>23</sup> The connection between 'racial health' in all these senses and 'peace' was central to the inspiration of Mollie Stack in creating the League. In explanation of the terms, she wrote:

Health represents Peace and harmonious balance in the innermost tissues of mind and body. Beauty seems to me to represent this idea carried out by every individual, by humanity universally . . . The ideals of our League when shared universally must help to root out the weeds of self-seeking, misunderstanding, and hatred, which lead to war.<sup>24</sup>

The motto of the League was 'Movement is Life', a phrase which had been popularized earlier by Isadora Duncan.<sup>25</sup> Its meaning was treated as self-evident and given numerous glosses over the years. League membership was patronizingly democratic: 'Any woman, old or young, married or single,

cultured or uncultured, may join our League'.<sup>26</sup> Members were required to sign a pledge of five, eventually six, promises:

I promise on my honour that:

- (1) I will try as far as possible to acquire some practical knowledge of the mechanism of the body.
- (2) I will spend at least 15 minutes per day, or 1¼ hours per week, on practical health-building in the body, such as walking, running, or sport, in the open air, or exercise indoors with windows open if possible.
- (3) At night and in the morning I will think of and determine to acquire the healthy, fresh-air body, which is my ambition.
- (4) I will do my best to co-operate in a friendly and helpful way with members of the League, and in the organization to accept all rulings of the committee.
- (5) I will try to introduce at least two new members.
- (6) I will buy at least one copy of each issue of the League's Official Organ, 'Health and Beauty'.<sup>27</sup>

At a time when shop and office women were earning about £3.0.0 a week, and private exercise classes cost seven guineas for ten lessons,<sup>28</sup> the League offered its benefits for 2/6 Annual Subscription, 2/- Entry Fee, and 6d. each class, on a pay-as-you-come basis rather than a pre-paid contract. Three months after its establishment, the League claimed 1,000 members.<sup>29</sup>

At the time of the League's creation, a number of activities which had formerly been relegated to the world of foreigners and health cranks began taking on a mass popularity – sunbathing and tanning, hiking, dieting and slimming.<sup>30</sup> Mollie Stack's timing was perfect, and went with the flow of change. She emphasized the modern slogans: normality, science, health, and fun. She understood the pressure of time and the demand for efficiency: 'in these days of rush, fifteen minutes a day is the utmost time most of us can spare. It is a pity, but it is a fact. The following exercises are designed to give the maximum results in the minimum of time'.<sup>31</sup> Her conservative and Christian ideal of service overlapped almost precisely with the popular demand for the means of self-improvement and the democratisation of privilege. Two quotations from her sister's and daughter's panegyric frame nicely this moment of *noblesse oblige* meeting popular self-interest:

Women were the makers or the breakers of the human race. She [Mollie] would bring expert teaching in health within the reach, not merely of the chosen few who could afford to pay for it, but for the excluded many who could not. Her beloved business girls and women, slum children, factory workers, mothers, should be offered identical opportunities with the rich.<sup>32</sup>

Many of our members have not given a second thought to our aim – YET. They joined, lured by the bait of slimness, or social comradeship, or cheapness – which are the League's superficial attractions: they will stay, fired by enthusiasm to improve their figures and develop their personalities. But they will *renew* their subscriptions, influenced (even if at first only faintly) by the League's aims, and gradually these will become the most precious part of it for them.<sup>33</sup>

This tension between an older, class bound, service-motivated femininity and a more modern, mass, commercial style ran through both organization and membership during the thirties. Both modes were thoroughly caught into similar though different imperatives of respectability; yet women operating in either mode still carried the possibility, or the possible risk, of moments of autonomous pleasure. Indeed, such possibility was enhanced as women slipped back and forth between the styles of femininity, shaping and adapting them while simultaneously being formed by them.

The older style of both organization and its ideal member was revealed chiefly in the League's all-female membership. Such gender segregation had been the norm in social, political and sporting organizations throughout the nineteenth century. By the 1920s, however, women-only groups were falling into disfavour against the mixed-sex companionate form.<sup>34</sup> To begin a women's group at this stage seems somewhat out of season. But the work of the League was with women's bodies, only partly clad and hence potentially sexually charged. The idea of mixed-sex exercise classes seems rarely to have entered the thoughts of the League's organizers because of the belief, derived from Mrs Conn's teachings, that training women to be mothers affected the whole of humanity.

[T]he League at present consists of women, not because we underrate the importance of men in the scheme of racial health, but we believe that if we succeed by means of our League in raising the general standard of Health and creating a fashion for physical fitness, all other questions of Racial Health will settle themselves automatically.<sup>35</sup>

Consequently, the system the League taught was explicitly designed for women and was not suitable for men. (The crucial difference lay in the training of the abdominal muscles: elastic for women, firm for men.)<sup>36</sup> The many thousands of members had not objection to women-only classes: perhaps because they had become used to girls' classes of physical education at school;<sup>37</sup> perhaps because the League provided a safe space where, as adults, they could return to the physical play of childhood and suspend for a time the self-control and fear of judgment of adult heterosociality.

Nonetheless, a tension built up. The diversity among the women themselves demanded attention: fear of the judgment of other women led to the creation of special classes for 'certain older ladies' who were 'shy of

joining because they feel they might be uncomfortable in classes designed for young girls'.<sup>38</sup> For other women there was a desire to share their activities in the League with the men in their lives: 'Many members have begged us to organise something for their brothers, husbands and sons.'<sup>39</sup> There was also some pressure from those men themselves: 'One despondent youth wrote: "Could you possibly arrange a waiting room for men? My girl is always at the League, and I thought she might dash in there now and again between classes"'.<sup>40</sup> A trial class for 'business men' under a qualified male instructor was promised in late 1933, but the subject of men was not mentioned again until mid-1937 when, in the midst of a severe financial crisis, the League magazine announced that, 'Here, at last, is a way in which all our men friends can put into practice their so often expressed desire to belong. Life membership is open to men as well as to women. It does not entitle men to join our classes'.<sup>41</sup> A few months later, this decision was amended, with male Life Members becoming entitled to attend men's classes which were also open to other men, not members, who were introduced by a League member. Men's classes were more expensive and were held away from the main halls where women exercised.<sup>42</sup>

Such ambivalence over gender integration was not based on a rejection of either heterosexuality or heterosociality. Indeed, these were the clear framework within which the League worked, interpreted in a variety of ways, of course. For Mollie Stack, 'Women are the natural Race Builders of the world'.<sup>43</sup> She also imagined 'a world where the women are so beautiful that they are an *inspiration* rather than a temptation – a joy to themselves and everyone else'.<sup>44</sup> She accepted that not all women would have children, and that 'the modern girl no longer regards wife-and-motherhood as her only career', although she suspected that, for most 'it will be her final career'.<sup>45</sup> The Bagot Stack Stretch and Swing Exercises for Health and Figure were therefore premised on passing the 'acid test of a woman's physical training. . . How is she fitted to stand that particular strain [childbearing] should it come upon her?'<sup>46</sup> This emphasis on motherhood diminished over the years, to the extent that, in 1936, members were asking whether there were 'special exercises for mothers or those about to become mothers'.<sup>47</sup> Meanwhile, other members were expressing their understanding of the League in a series of short stories in its magazine. These were all variations on the same theme: young business woman, tired, lonely, unhappy, and unfit, is talked into going to a League class by a friend, somewhat against her will; she is revitalized by the experience, makes wonderful friends, and finds a boyfriend, usually a League member's brother, who is bowled over by her vitality and healthy beauty.

In all, whether the goal was healthy baby, boyfriend, or husband, the League's purpose was clearly presented by its leaders and welcomed by its members as better fitting women for their place beside men as wives and mothers. But the means to that goal was through having fun with the girls. Every day, claimed the magazine editor, the League received letters,

'thanking us for the jolly evenings spent together by our members'.<sup>48</sup> For many young married women, 'League nights are their nights "off", it seems, for they arrive early and they stay to the end'; "'It's fun," say the members, whether they are doing the most intricate exercises or resting between classes with knitting and gossip to pass the time'.<sup>49</sup> For many women, married or single, the League became a club, not just a class; they made friends; they developed a loyalty and dedication to an ongoing group; it became a way of life for one night a week and they had a lot of fun.<sup>50</sup> Here, then, was a small space for women's pleasure that offered little challenge to the privileges and power of men and the heterosocial world.

Nonetheless, it was a space apart, and women-only organizations were coming to be associated with the moral values of an old-fashioned femininity. Certainly, there were some elements of these older values in the League's rhetoric, but, overall, the League's gender segregation cannot be said to be based in any simple prudery or diffidence. For example, in terms of clothing the body beautiful, the League encouraged a strikingly modern presentation. Its uniform was revealingly rational, rather than especially modest.<sup>51</sup> The simple black satin knickers and sleeveless white blouse were similar to the costume that Mrs Stack's child students had worn in the 1920s, a considerably briefer version of Mrs Conn's uniform,<sup>52</sup> and both were considered daring in their times, in contrast with the standard gym tunic and stockings or the Grecian draperies of other contemporary physical culture groups. (By the mid 1930s, the black and white blouse-and-knickers costume had been widely copied and become the orthodox garb of all the movements for health and beauty through rhythmic exercise – the Everywoman's League of Health, the Legion of Health and Happiness, the League of Health and Grace.)<sup>53</sup> Paradoxically, the very modernity of the uniform did mean, for many women, that the women-only rule of the League was crucial, in terms of the disabling modesty, decency and vanity that would have been called out by the presence of men: 'I mean, let's face it, some people used to look incredible in the uniform. These great fat ladies in these little short shorts. But as you were all together, all women, nobody bothered at all.'<sup>54</sup>

Mollie Bagot Stack herself went even further in terms of costume, advocating private nudism:

This 'skin-airing' should be practised daily with nothing on – in private – let me hasten to add. I am not at present enough of a crank to fail to see the humour in massed groups of nude, self-conscious and unacquainted humans, seriously pursuing *health* only as a goal. I like the goal of beauty, and beauty is unself-conscious.<sup>55</sup>

A member and teacher, Eunice Barnes, was also a proponent of such nudity for oneself. Her pleasure was midnight nude swimming:

What fun this midnight swim really is. . . Don't be afraid of taking off your costume. Brief as it is you would be surprised the difference that little bit of wool makes. There is nobody to see you except the fishes and they won't mind at all (you must of course be a good way out to sea) . . .<sup>56</sup>

The crucial terms in these statements seem to be 'private', 'unself-conscious', 'nobody to see you', when naked, and 'no men to see you', when in uniform, all associated with 'beauty' and 'fun'. The body that Mollie Stack worked with was not to be despised or 'controlled or *suppressed* by the mind';<sup>57</sup> it was to be experienced as healthy and hence beautiful. The benefits of her system were to be felt: her exercises 'are best judged by *sensation* (essentially a woman's method) rather than by logic!';<sup>58</sup> they will create a new power within herself which she will *feel*.<sup>59</sup> The sensations of the naked body were to be enjoyed in solitude, away from judgmental or lustful eyes. The sensations of the uniformed, exercising body would be enhanced by friendly co-operation in standardized mass movement. The naked body was not an object for exhibition. But the appropriately clad and carefully posed body was. That is to say, part of the League's enormous success seems to have derived exactly from controlled exhibitionism, of both the individual and the mass, an economy of the spectacle that was anything but old-fashioned.

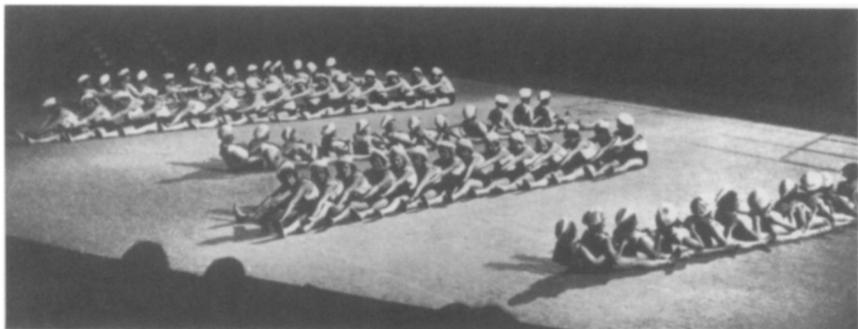
From the inception of the League in 1930, Mollie Stack used the mass demonstration as a major form of advertising and to engender a sense of excitement. Demonstrations had long been a standard part of English physical culture; the League's innovation was to make them large and public. In June 1930, to a well-orchestrated newspaper coverage and the beat of the band of the Queen Victoria Rifles, 'seventy pretty, bare-legged City girls wearing as little as possible were led by two resigned-looking policemen into Hyde Park'.<sup>60</sup> (Mollie Stack had been promising the press 1,000 members exercising in unison.)<sup>61</sup> The Hyde Park Demonstration became an annual event, as did the Albert Hall indoor display, inaugurated in 1931 and transferred to Olympia in 1935 when 2,500 members performed together. The largest number of League members co-ordinated for such events is claimed to be 5,000, achieved at the 1936 indoor Olympia Demonstration and the 1937 outdoor Coronation Pageant at the Wembley Stadium. (In that same year, 1937, the National Fitness Council sponsored a Festival of Youth in which 11,000 people from various organizations participated, 900 from the League.)<sup>62</sup>

Mollie Stack claimed her inspiration for the League's mass exercise demonstrations came from the nationalist Sokol Movement of democratic Czechoslovakia.<sup>63</sup> However, by the mid-1930s, what popular knowledge there had been of the Sokol was subsumed by the more intense images of massed youth on parade in fascist Germany and Italy. The League began to face uneasy, and unfair, comparison with the League of German Maidens and the Balilla.<sup>64</sup>



Fritz Giese, *Girlkultur* (see n. 129), facing pp. 59, 112

Above: two photographs of Tiller Girls, 1925



Stack, *Romance of the League* (see n. 1)

'Prunella's Production in the Albert Hall', 1936: 'Members (none of whose costumes cost more than sixpence) as Sailors'.

But there was other inspiration: theatre and film. Mollie Stack had recognized that her thousands of amateur women,

could not be drilled and drilled again until perfectly synchronised, as a regiment or a theatre troupe can. Quickly I realised that our exercises must be standardised and set in sequences to music, so that they could be learned off by heart like poetry – physical poetry became my aim.<sup>65</sup>

Using the basic building block of the sequence set, Mollie began to develop a precision performance that echoed popular modern work in the theatre. That development really took firm shape in the work of her performance successor, Peggy St Lo. Peggy, and her sister Joan, had grown up with Prunella and her cousin Cinderella, and all four had been part of Mollie's first training class in the mid 1920s. On completion of the course, the sisters took up work in the theatre for the next several years, Peggy being appointed ballet mistress to a musical comedy chorus line.<sup>66</sup> Shortly after the formation of the League, both women returned as teachers and organizers, and stayed for the next 57 years.<sup>67</sup> From Mollie's death in 1935, Peggy St Lo was in charge of production: the visualization, choreography and stage management of a chorus line of thousands of enthusiastic amateurs.<sup>68</sup> Her work shows a strong influence of theatrical precision work. Photographs of League displays show a remarkable resemblance to, for example, the simpler tableaux patterns produced by Busby Berkeley in his Hollywood musicals, as well as to those of the chorus spectacles of the 1930s music hall and Follies. (The black and white uniform was particularly effective for such photographs.)

Yet these were not chorus girls but respectable business girls and young marrieds. They were on stage, showing off their bodies, but really, they were just having fun, enjoying themselves tremendously. Any diffidence they might have felt was condemned as selfishness; exhibitionism was renamed loyalty. Organizing the Olympia Display alone for the first time in 1935, Prunella desperately exhorted members:

EVERYONE can join in our great Recruiting March into Olympia. We want the youngest, and the oldest, fattest and thinnest, most elementary and most veteran, marching side by side. Last year we were 1,000. This year we must be 3,000. Members, if you love our League, here is your big chance to show that love, and we know you will! Cut out feelings of shyness or self-consciousness. They are selfish, fundamentally, and unnecessary.<sup>69</sup>

Of course, the public at the League's displays was not really an anonymous audience but largely made up of other members, friends and families; its gaze was enthusiastic and sympathetic, not critical or lascivious. (Although one wonders about the significance, and veracity, of the *Daily Sketch* report

of the League's 1937 Coronation Pageant: 'The audience at Wembley Stadium consisted largely of men, who continually cheered the Greek goddesses of 1937'.<sup>70</sup> Nonetheless, the League did sanction public displays of scantily-clad female bodies that would have been unthinkable for respectable women in an earlier time.<sup>71</sup> Through an ethic of desexualized fun, the League was able to appropriate to itself some of the glamour of the increasingly popular world of film, while at the same time maintaining or, rather, creating a new standard of respectable femininity for modern business girls and young housewives.

The League paid very careful attention to the presentation of itself in photography, posing group shots, vetting the pictures that were used in any publicity. This care was not duplicated by its competitors and the difference was telling. Photographs of exercise classes published in *Mother and Daughter/Health and Beauty* always looked attractive, alluring to prospective members; those published by its major competitor, *Beautycraft*, often showed the women in ungainly awkward poses. On the other hand, *Beautycraft* also published photographs of professionally beautiful bodies: artfully posed nude studies that a later generation would call pin-ups.<sup>72</sup> The League was more demure. Its photographs of beautiful women were designed more to be pinned on the bedroom mirror than to the back of the garage door.

Confess now, aren't you guilty of standing in front of your mirror and trying to cultivate a smile like Prunella's? I know I am . . . I now have two photos on my dressing table, one of Prunella and one of Shirley Temple, both smiling, eyes twinkling with fun. . . Their smiles are so infectious I can't help smiling back.<sup>73</sup>

Throughout the 1930s, the League's leader, Prunella Stack, was cultivated as the epitome of the perfect physical beauty that comes from radiant health: wholesome not pornographic, unself-conscious not narcissistic.<sup>74</sup> In her mid-teens she was selected 'as the child best fitted to demonstrate for the New Health Society'.<sup>75</sup> At nineteen, she was hailed by the *Daily Mail* as 'the most physically perfect girl in the world'.<sup>76</sup> At twenty-four, she led the League contingent at the 1938 Festival of Youth at Wembley and quite overwhelmed journalist James Douglas: 'The queen of this wonderful spectacle was Miss Prunella Stack. Nothing more exquisite could be imagined than her beauty and her glamour – beyond the dreams of Hollywood.'<sup>77</sup> (That same year, a rather more jaundiced journalist described her as 'Prunella Stack – a radiant, strapping, 23-year-old Nordic, with excellent teeth & a rather too thin upper lip' and captioned a photograph of her 'Führer Stack'.)<sup>78</sup> Prunella was usually photographed in League uniform, although large portraits regularly appeared in the League's magazine.

As well as Prunella, posed photographs of Mollie Bagot Stack and of

other League teachers and prize-winning members were regularly published in the League magazine. Such photography seems to have been part of a concerted campaign by the League to foster among its members and potential members adulation and emulation of its leaders and teachers. The terms 'loyalty', 'dedication', and 'enthusiasm' were used extensively in the League's rhetoric, and were supposed to be reciprocal between teachers and members. Just as the League's stand that it was helping girls to have wholesome and improving fun together was able to balance the tension between feminine respectability and modern heterosociality, so its encouragement of enthusiastic loyalty was able to hold together generations and classes of women against the competing claims of deference, defiance and democracy.

In its early years, the League strongly promoted cross-generational harmony among women. Its publicity emphasized that young and old could exercise together and that age was no bar. It was with regret that the 'Older Ladies Class' was set up in 1934, although by 1936 the first Children's Class and a Junior Section (taking girls aged 3 to 15 years, and boys 3 to 9) were hailed as significant developments.<sup>79</sup> It delighted in publishing photographs such as the one showing 'Miss Hennessy, oldest (74) and Betty Wood, youngest (3), members of the Bristol Centre exercis[ing] together'.<sup>80</sup> Most importantly of all, it sought to develop an ideal of perfect harmony across the generation gap between mothers and daughters: an ideal incarnated in the bond between Mollie Stack and her daughter Prunella; an ideal proclaimed in the very title of the League magazine, *Mother and Daughter*. Mollie Stack spoke of her vision in 1933:

My ideal is to have mothers and daughters so deeply attached to each other, not only by blood ties and family affection, but also by similarity of hobby and ideals, that they will be dearest friends, partners, and companions. I wish to help wipe away the look of patient misery that mars the beauty of an ageing mother's eye.<sup>81</sup>

In seeking candidates to undertake League teacher-training, Mollie highlighted the possibilities for a "mother-and-daughter" profession . . . There are wonderful openings for mothers to organise centres for their daughters who are training to be teachers'.<sup>82</sup> The model she offered was her own. 'Prunella and I work together . . . We have great fun, and we are very happy and independent working together for a common ideal.'<sup>83</sup>

As well as cross-generational friendship, the League sought to enhance cross-class concord or, rather, to deny the existence of all such distinctions that divided women. The League's uniform was made obligatory for exactly this reason.

[T]he•e, in those black satin 'panties' and white blouses, stand grand-mothers, mothers, and daughters – some all from the same family. Side

by side, body-bending and toe-touching, will be a countess and a char-woman. The girl who drives her own car will link hands with the one who has snatched an evening from selling stockings in a street market. Behind the scenes, fragile crêpe de chine will dangle on the next peg to 'art silk', and Bond-street suits jostle bargains from the basement. For ours is the friendliest and most democratic league.<sup>84</sup>

Such protestations of democracy ring a little feebly 50 years later.

[T]he Croydon [League Centre] is very proud of being democratic. 'Mistresses and maids', says Mrs Henderson, 'come together to the same class. We practice what the politicians preach. If we have cars, we drive our maids over with us, and we have grand fun.'<sup>85</sup>

But the liberal impulse to refuse recognition of class distinction was firmly and proudly held by leaders and members alike. During interview, long-time League members J.B. and E.T., who both joined in the early 1930s, spoke enthusiastically of the 'social mix' of League classes. The notion of superiority tempered by service that was inherent in this impulse found further expression in the League running classes in business establishments and factories,<sup>86</sup> and its provision of free classes in the Distressed Areas<sup>87</sup> (one of the few explicit and practical acknowledgements made of the economic depression and its social consequences). It took on more formal political overtones when the League held 'two dinners for leaders of industry and heads of business houses employing large female staffs'.<sup>88</sup>

By and large, the democracy practiced by the League was personal not structural. Until financial difficulties dictated a constitutional change from private company to Friendly Society in 1938,<sup>89</sup> members had no say in the running of the League.<sup>90</sup> Instead, they could call their teachers by their first names. In a society where personal relations were still deeply imbued with the oppressive etiquette of class, this gesture induced a shift from deference to devotion. The League leadership identified itself with its membership to the extent that all were working women:

Rich and leisured people can afford money and time for expensive massage and beauty treatments to keep their bodies as they should be. We, who work for our living, have to be our own experts; and how much more amusing it is!<sup>91</sup>

But class distinction was an inevitable, and necessary, component of the League's practice. Women who sought to become teacher-organizers were required to undertake a 30 week training course at a cost of 50 guineas, or a 60 week course for 90 guineas; those wishing to become organizers needed a 10 week course costing 25 guineas. Expected return was around £4 a week.<sup>92</sup>

This clearly marked League teachers as being relatively well off and socially superior to most of the members who were identified as predominantly housewives and business girls. 'The League is now taking a census of members' occupations, and long lists are gradually being completed, with the words "Married", "Typist", "Clerk", "Domestic Duties" following each other down the page.'<sup>93</sup> The social distance between teachers and members, combined with the teachers' healthy beauty and pedagogic power, made them supremely eligible objects for adoration by younger women. The drawing power of the League was premised not only in fun and friendship, but also in the fan syndrome. 'Each instructress has a big "fan" following, who eagerly queue up for her sixpenny classes half an hour previously.'<sup>94</sup> Admiration for, devotion to, even crushes on teachers seem to have been encouraged and controlled as an important aspect of the attraction of the League. League teacher E.T. remembered Mollie Bagot Stack telling the trainee teachers that,

they would be made a fuss of. It was up to them. 'If you let all this fuss go to your head you will be letting me down.' She didn't want us to put ourselves on pedestals, to think ourselves much more important than we really were.<sup>95</sup>

Central to this emotional climate of heroine worship was Prunella. As she herself wrote, '[b]rought up as a health and beauty goddess, I was not used to lack of homage'.<sup>96</sup> After Mollie's death in 1935, the League's rather old-fashioned, domestic imagery of mother and daughter in perfect harmony was displaced. Mollie was now presented as a saint who had given her life for the League and its ideals, and Prunella emerged as a plucky, young and beautiful heroine, a fairy-tale princess to be emulated and adored.<sup>97</sup> Her glamour was indeed beyond the dreams of Hollywood. This persona was established to perfection in 1938 when Prunella married a true Highland laird (and heavyweight boxer) Lord David Douglas Hamilton. The League hired a train to take the fans to Glasgow. *The Sunday Chronicle* pronounced it 'The Strangest Society Wedding in Britain. Royalty, Typists, Boxers to See "Perfect Girl" Wed.'<sup>98</sup> *The Sunday Express* reported that 'a mob of 10,000 excited women and girls besieged Glasgow Cathedral to see the year's most popular bride.'<sup>99</sup> According to the *Daily Mail*, these excited women 'surged in the streets around the cathedral' and then, '[a]s the couple left to the skirl of bagpipes, the crowds broke the police cordon and many women fainted in the rush'.<sup>100</sup>

At this moment, with 10,000 rapturous fans surging and fainting, and another 160,000 waiting avidly at home for word and pictures, we need stop and ask, what on earth was this League really about?

The answer to that question depends on who is asking, on the position from which one judges. There is no singular, universal truth about the League; there are instead partial perspectives. Singular truths have, of

course, been forwarded: the League as mere trivial anecdote to the real history of the 1930s; as a proto-Nazi organization; as a simple women-run profit-making business; as a representation of the mass ornament. But, if any of these truths stands alone, it then becomes a weapon of power exercised on the meanings and bodies of the women of the League and, indeed of all women as historical subjects. Instead, we need to see all these truths as partial and we must ask them to declare their interests and partake in a conversation to create a wider, situated understanding.

In that conversation, the history of the Women's League of Health and Beauty can be asked to speak in two directions. It can speak outwards, to the mainstream of traditional history, to the standard historical concerns of Britain in the inter-war years. It can speak of fascism and unemployment; of patriotism, pacifism and internationalism; of eugenics, suffrage and social purity; of class information, corporate capitalism, Taylorism and mass marketing; of romanticism and modernism. In this story, however, we would tend to lose sense of the agency of the women involved; they become part of a mass, manipulated by supra-individual structural forces. On the other hand, the League's history can be asked to speak inwards, to the creation of a new feminine subjectivity. It can speak of a generation of women with specific fears and desires and ideals, who sought some measure of control over and pleasure in their lives. It can speak of their fear of not finding a husband, or getting a bad one; of not finding a job or losing one; of failure to find fulfilment in motherhood; of pain or poverty or loneliness. It can speak of the desire for an attractive body and personality; for friendship, sex, love and play; for community and emotional bonding. It can speak to ideals: of one's place in the community, the nation, the world; of personal and social change. Such an inward story, however, would tend towards Trevelyan's 'history with the politics left out', a timeless saga of individual consciousness. What is needed is a combination of the two directions, not a simple juxtaposition of the two movements but some sort of integration, a balancing of the social and the personal, of politics and pleasure, of structure and subjectivity.

Let me begin, then, with the outward spiral of meaning. From its beginning, the Women's League of Health and Beauty proclaimed itself to be much more than a mere physical culture movement. Fitness was not an end in itself, but a means, a foundation for other things: for all other forms of physical activity, for personal development, for inner harmony – a rhythmic balance of body and spirit.<sup>101</sup> Most importantly, fitness, or health, was a metaphor for peace; training for the first was a means of realizing the second. The League provided not just a method of achieving fitness, but a loyal band of women determined to solve the great problems of modern civilization – poverty and war.<sup>102</sup>

In the earliest, expansive days of the League's magazine, there were a number of articles aimed at members' general and political education: on women and science, women and the economy. These were rather quickly

dropped, but throughout the magazine's life there was a regular contribution on women and politics, always written in a clear style, explaining basic issues and concepts. These were initially written by a lawyer simply identified as A.C.E., who covered such issues as the World Economic Conference, the new Unemployment Bill, agricultural policy, and fascism. At the time of Mollie Stack's death in 1935, A.C.E. was removed from political writing, and set to a series on 'The Girl and the Law' dealing with the legal rights of working women. His place on the political desk was taken by Helena Normanton, a feminist prominent in the struggle to open the Bar to women.<sup>103</sup> The political flavour of the articles did not change very much, with the emphasis remaining on support for the League of Nations, opposition to Japanese, Italian and German aggression, denunciation of fascism, a tolerant attitude towards Russia and Communism and an uneasy one towards Roosevelt's isolationism. All these political articles were accompanied by a disclaimer that the views expressed were those of the contributor, not necessarily of the League.

The politics that the League itself publicly espoused shifted during the decade, but circled around an idealist internationalism. Mollie Stack evinced a rather mystical pacifism, described thus by her sister, Nan:

My sister and I have often talked about her 'Coming New Millenium' of universal 'Health and Peace.' What vision she had! She believed that such an idea could be made a concrete fact, and not remain only the dream of vague visionaries, and she often said that 'organised womanhood' was the 'open sesame.' The League was her beginning . . .<sup>104</sup>

After Mollie's death, the League's rhetoric changed from her vague vitalism, with its central tenet of the organic and harmonious connection of nature and soul through movement,<sup>105</sup> to an apparently more pragmatic pacifism. Over and over, the magazine urged unity, friendship and determination to find a way to save the world from the scourge of war. But the only strategy it offered was metaphoric: 'Health is our primary objective, because diseased minds are not found in healthy bodies, and no healthy mind could ever desire war'.<sup>106</sup> Left in the dark about appropriate action, some members devised sincere but naive solutions:

One of my friends in the League tells me that she never used to think about unemployment, war and slums because she did not see what she could do about them. But when she found out that there were things in her life that caused all these problems – bad temper, selfishness and chronic untidiness – she decided that she'd got to change.

It made such a difference that within three days three of her friends had also started building peace by beginning with themselves. So you can see how quickly it spreads. If you want to do something practical about peace, why not start where she did? Make a list of the things in you which

can or do cause war, and start changing them now, instead of hoping to be better some day.<sup>107</sup>

When forced by world events to take some sort of active stand, the League's leadership projected a similarly woolly-headed idealism. At the time of the Munich crisis of October 1938, the League sought to act in concert with other women's organizations throughout the world, its eventual action being to urge united prayers for peace. 'When every woman in the world has joined her prayers and thoughts with ours, this united spiritual action will be irresistible.'<sup>108</sup> Afterwards, the League sent a telegram to Neville Chamberlain: 'Heartfelt Gratitude'.<sup>109</sup> But these were patriotic pacifists, proud to be 'citizens of the country which has saved the peace of the world'.<sup>110</sup> Accordingly, they argued that 'belief in peace is consistent with preparation for defence',<sup>111</sup> urged members to train for national service and began planning first aid classes.

The League's internationalism, pacifism and anti-fascism were not widely appreciated. Indeed, a number of public commentators and others saw it as some sort of pro-Nazi front. Asked whether, in the thirties, there was any sense of the League being a bit cranky, made up of fanatics or health freaks, long-term teacher E. T. replied, 'Yes, I think so. I'm sorry to say, I think so. I remember my aunty saying to me, "Oh", she said, "I don't know about this League. It puts me in mind of the Nazis".'<sup>112</sup> The journalist mentioned above, who termed Prunella, 'Führer Stack', also wrote, 'She studied new methods of physical training last year in Berlin. "She's frightfully keen on anything German," I was told.'<sup>113</sup> And, indeed, she was. She admired 'the sunburned fitness so manifest there',<sup>114</sup> but nonetheless found it disturbing 'that more than half of the jolly, cheery men that you watch in the swimming pool can, at a few moments' notice, turn into black-coated storm troopers, green or blue-coated police, or one of the many other varieties of uniform'.<sup>115</sup> That is to say, Prunella's enthusiasm attempted to distinguish between the physical fitness of the German people and their political system, a rather too subtle point as popular antipathy to fascism developed.

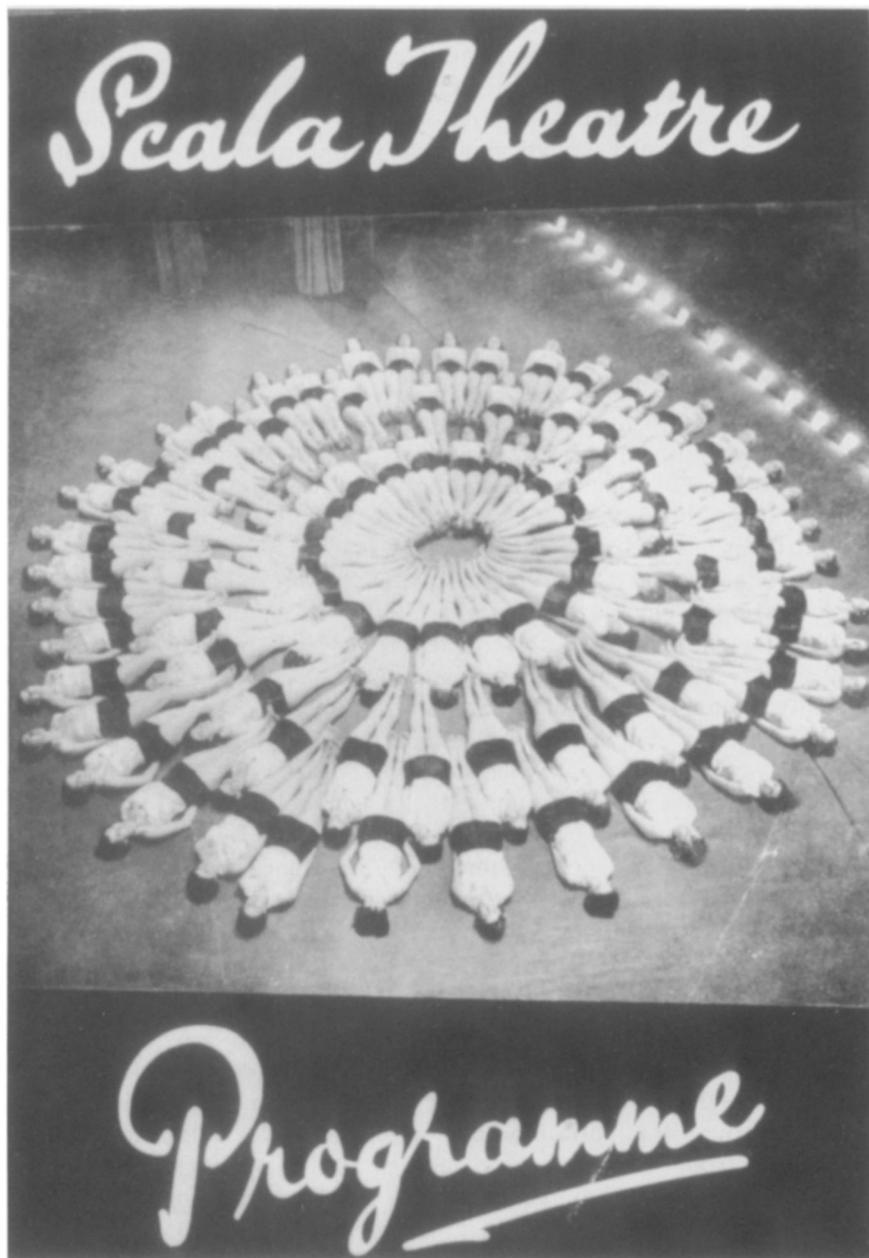
As against these intimations of Nazi sympathizing, there was another, obverse, stance taken towards the League. Some journalists saw the League as Britain's answer to the Nazis, beating them at their own game. 'War Minister Hore-Belisha jokes that the British Army needs [Prunella] for recruiting. The theme for her League is English "Racial Health" in answer to the Nazis' nonsense of the glories of the "Aryan race".'<sup>116</sup> Both the pro and anti-Nazi identification of the League derived from the widespread and automatic association of mass physical culture programmes with the compulsory and militarily-motivated system of physical education in Nazi Germany, an association that not only affected the League but also the debates around the Government's Physical Training and Recreation Bill, presented in 1937.<sup>117</sup> Popular memory had forgotten the century-long pre-eminence of the Scandinavians in physical education and the Czechoslo-

vaks in mass gymnastics. It was only since the early 1920s that Germany had become recognized as the source of major innovation in the worlds of dance, physical education and gymnastics, through the work of men like Dalcroze, Laban, Mensendieck, Medau.<sup>118</sup> Their work was certainly appropriated by the Nazis, and used for purposes of propaganda and military preparation, but such purposes were not inherent in the system and, indeed, many of its foremost exponents fled to England and America as the thirties advanced. Nonetheless, the association between fitness and fascism was established and was to haunt the League for decades.<sup>119</sup>

To other contemporaries, the League was a simple commercial venture. Some, without evidence, criticized it for exploiting its members and providing the Stacks with an easy fortune.<sup>120</sup> Others saw it as a model opportunity for even greater exploitation. Competitors sprang up, pirating its method of rhythmical exercises, its organizational techniques, and its ideology associating individual fitness with universal peace. After the first issue of the League's magazine, *Beauty*, its editor, Jessie Harvey-Smith, absconded with the idea, setting up her own rival magazine, *Beautycraft*, to be the 'representative organ of health and beauty culture'.<sup>121</sup> Groups that *Beautycraft* promoted included The Everywoman's League of Health, founded in 1933 by Sali Lobel, a Manchester dancing teacher; Moira Cronin-Bond's Legion of Health and Happiness, based in London, whose theme was the 1933 hit song, 'Bend Down Sister If You Want To Stay Thin'; Jessie Harvey-Smith's own Institute of Beautycraft; and the League of Health and Grace, established in Liverpool by the English champion gymnast, Jessie Greenwood. The strongest of these was The Everywoman's League of Health, which tried to pass itself off as, and to cash in on the publicity of, the WLHB. The public face of The Everywoman's League was identical to the point of plagiarism:

We aim at health and happiness – health meaning beauty – happiness meaning peace, a coordination of all these only resulting through the medium of radiant health.<sup>122</sup>

In early 1934, *Beautycraft* became a more general interest magazine, providing only an insert news-sheet with information about the specific organizations. The Everywoman's League, apparently then brought out its own magazine, *Life and Beauty*. Neither magazine lasted long,<sup>123</sup> and soon The Everywoman's League, along with all the other smaller health and beauty movements, dropped from sight. (Whatever did happen to the Legion of Health and Happiness?) None were elected on to the Central Council of Recreative Physical Training, established by the Board of Education in 1935 to coordinate work in the sphere of physical recreation. The WLHB was the only health and beauty organization to achieve this goal (in 1936),<sup>124</sup> followed in 1937 by the appointment of Prunella (still only 22) to



Woman's League of Health and Beauty . Archive

**Scala Theatre Revue, London; programme cover 13–14 March 1939.**

the National Fitness Council, an advisory body to oversee the work of the Government's Physical Training and Recreation Act.<sup>125</sup>

Coordination, centralization, registration: all tended to enforce uniformity and respectability and to discriminate against the small and unorthodox. Women's physical fitness was trapped once more in the trammels of patriotic motherhood:

Lord Milner has declared that 50 per cent of the men who come for military service in this country are physically unfit. But the sons of these girls who are being trained all over the country to be physically fit are sure to raise the national standard of health.<sup>126</sup>

The leagues and legions and movements, run to provide livings for their proprietors, but gaining wider legitimacy by proclaiming visions of peace and beauty, all disappeared. Even the WLHB suffered and was forced to change under the pressure of accredited competition.<sup>127</sup> The League faced a severe financial crisis in 1937—occasioned, so it claimed, by the bad weather, the Coronation, and the 'flu epidemic. It restructured as a Friendly Society, thus becoming eligible for a grant (£6,000) from the National Fitness Council; but its membership was depleted so severely by the war that in 1941 it went into voluntary liquidation and restructured yet again as a limited liability company. In the midst of all this, Mollie's vision of 'Health leading to Peace' died,<sup>128</sup> and demands of commercial viability prevailed; service to humanity transmuted to a service industry.

There is another interpretation of the League, related both to fascism and to commerce or, rather, to a more abstract notion of capitalism. Writing in 1931 of the precision dancing of the Tiller Girls Dance Troupe, the German philosopher and critic of popular culture, Siegfried Kracauer, declared them exemplars of the greatness of American production:

In that postwar era, in which *prosperity* appeared limitless and which could scarcely conceive of unemployment, the Girls were artificially manufactured in the USA and exported to Europe by the dozens. Not only were they American products; at the same time they demonstrated the greatness of American production. I distinctly recall the appearance of such troupes in the season of their glory. When they formed an undulating snake, they radiantly illustrated the virtues of the conveyor belt; when they tapped their feet in fast tempo, it sounded like *business*, *business*; when they kicked their legs high with mathematical precision, they joyously affirmed the progress of rationalization; and when they kept repeating the same movements without ever interrupting their routine, one envisioned an uninterrupted chain of autos gliding from the factories into the world, and believed that the blessings of prosperity had no end.<sup>129</sup>

In general, Kracauer's analyses shed brilliant light on to the phantasmagoria of popular culture under the Weimar Republic and its relationships with emergent fascism. However, from his lofty height as an observing intellectual, Kracauer made two crucial empirical mistakes in this case: the Tiller Girls were English, not American, and the first troupes were formed in the 1890s,<sup>130</sup> contemporaneously with Frederick Taylor's work at Bethlehem Steel, not consequent upon it, 10 years before Frank Gilbreth's studies of the forms of movement, and almost 20 years before Henry Ford's assembly line at Highland Park.<sup>131</sup> Nonetheless, Kracauer's abstract points still stand, since what he was addressing was an ethos of mechanized capitalism which, by the interwar years, embraced not only America but England and western Europe; an ethos based in a principle of simultaneity of the forms of work and art and leisure. That simultaneity has often been remarked between aspects of scientific management and modern art: 'Space-time relations form the very basis of the method: Motion is dissected into phases so as to reveal its inner structure'.<sup>132</sup> Quite independently of each other, in 1912, Gilbreth was making Cyclograph models and Duchamp was creating 'Nude Descending the Staircase'. (Kracauer himself would dispute the notion of independence of production, arguing rather for an 'aesthetic reflex of the rationality aspired to by the prevailing economic system'.<sup>133</sup> This, however, is not the place to engage in a critique of his argument.) For my purposes, Kracauer's inspiration was to look beyond forms of high art to popular culture, and to see the same principle of simultaneity operating there. Of course, Kracauer analyzed the Tiller Girls from his position as a male spectator, and so identified their activities as leisure, rather than the work that it was to the dancers themselves. To find the principle of simultaneity in the field of leisure, we should, more accurately, look to such groups as the Women's League of Health and Beauty where standardized precision movement was performed by women voluntarily seeking fun and fitness, rather than to the professional paid workers of the Tiller Troupes.

Standardization of units of time and movement was central to the organization of mass production of goods and the mass provision of services. Tens of thousands of League members spent their working days performing standardized, regimented movements in factories, shops and offices. Come evening, they changed their clothes and performed standardized, regimented movements in League classes. Standardization of time and movement was central to the League's production of mass fitness in class and mass precision displays. A member visiting the League outpost in Sydney reported feeling quite at home in the familiarity of the classroom activities.<sup>134</sup> Members from branches around England and from Canada and Australia came together for the mass displays, knowing only their own sequences, and needing only one rehearsal to fit them all together, and that mostly to get them on and off the stage in the right order.<sup>135</sup>

The 'allowance' for each girl, for demonstrations, is five feet apart

standing side by side, and three feet apart standing one behind the other. This is a carefully fixed measurement in the League, and very necessary, since all the teachers in different centres follow this, to ensure that visiting teams 'fit in' with each other in a big, combined show, such as Wembley.<sup>136</sup>

Standardization was the way of the machine, of modernity, but not everyone was happy with the direction – in play as in work. The newly-coined term, robot, was used widely to disparage certain forms of standardized movement and, in addition to the older term, automaton, to describe its performer. Capitalist workers and totalitarian gymnasts alike were reviled. The League, which claimed to be 'regimenting mass happiness' had to deflect the charges. Of course, as women, undertaking voluntary leisure activities, League members were mildly mocked rather than condemned:

They went untiringly through a programme equal to two rounds of golf, a football match, and a week's cricket combined. And they were as fresh as paint at the end . . . They enjoy doing exercises that would bore most men to death.<sup>137</sup>

In October 1936, the League magazine carried an article by Mollie's sister, Nan Stack, on 'Regimenting Happiness', in which she asked, in her own curious way, the central questions that had been exercising social critics since the decline of the privileged classes and the rise of the masses:

And how to explain the Machine Age and its relation to man? Surely it is one of two things. It is either something that is fundamentally changing human nature and changing it so effectively that emotions in the long-run will be mechanised; or something which will help develop man's latent powers and lessen his struggle, thus giving him freedom of spirit and a chance to work out the miracle of his destiny . . . Who is going to find the secret of how to express mass thought in terms of the personality of each unit that makes up the masses?<sup>138</sup>

The article stimulated an essay competition on 'Need Standardisation Cramp Individuality?' By postal vote of members, the 'No' case won: 'Standardisation is the framework by which we climb to better things by healthy exercise of disciplined personalities . . . Standardisation sets up a goal, efficiency attains it, individuality implements it'.<sup>139</sup> In Kracauer's patronizing term, the 'little shopgirls'<sup>140</sup> were sorting out their own relation to modernity.

Which returns us to the inward spiral of interpretation, to the women themselves. What did they think the League was about? What stories can their participation be asked to tell?

From an interview with J.B., who joined the League in 1934:

It took off like a bomb to begin with because it was something utterly new . . . There was nothing else for women at all at the time I think . . . For myself I was a music teacher and I joined when I was about 22 or something like that, simply because these exercises, they'd started them down here . . . Our school was very good on drill and gymnastics and that sort of thing. A small school, but we'd had a very good teacher, and when you leave school, you know, you don't really do anything. So to do exercises again like we did at school, which was twice a week or more, it was very nice . . . I think a lot of people missed gym when they left school and they were delighted to find classes that they could go to . . .

Well, getting people there: for, instance, if I talked to you, and I put over enough enthusiasm for you to think, 'Right, I'd like to join that', that's how they get them in . . . 'Why don't you join the League? It's fun.' Just from one person to another. It was the enthusiasm of one person, getting their friend, getting another friend to join . . .

Prunella Stack came down and actually opened our centre. That was in 1934. She was so beautiful. Of course, Mrs Stack started it, but she was leading it for such a short time before she died. I never saw her. And Prunella had to take over. I think she was only eighteen and she was so pretty, slim and very pretty and a gorgeous outgoing personality. And a very good speaker, even at that age . . .

I tell you one thing that is lovely about the League. You wear this uniform. You go. You have no idea what people are, their circumstances in life, so that you get friendly with people who just sort of attract you and it doesn't matter whether they're rich or poor or anything . . .

I always used to be in [the big rallies] before I got too ancient. I was always in them. The fun of those, of going up to a rehearsal, meeting people that you know from other centres. It was just a terrific thrill and everybody enjoys it so enormously. It's enjoyment really with the League, as much as going and exercising . . .

Our pianist fell and broke a wrist and while it was still in plaster she came and played for us. That's the dedication. While she had still got this one in plaster she fell and broke the other one. She still came and managed just with fingers to play enough for us to do the exercises. [And that was not because she needed the money?] Just dedication. She would not let us down. [How did that loyalty, that sense of dedication get established?] I suppose in a way it was Mrs Stack's enthusiasm in the first place which I think rubbed off on so many people who are members, even people who did not meet her . . .

Nearly all my friends went up to London to work. They were office people. Most in time were married. Some, of course, left town when they married, but I've still got friends that I've made over the years at the League, and they married . . . My husband put up with me going to the League once a week. All the husbands put up with it. They'd come to the rallies as part of the audience . . .

As far as the League was concerned, it did not mean all that much to me then because we didn't know much about it. It was just exercises. But, of course, I made a lot of friends there. It was a club as well as being a class. It's lovely and it gradually becomes a way of life . . . No, never anything, any sort of peace movement or anything of that sort at all . . . All the time I've been, we've never had any mention of religion, or peace, or any movements at all, and no women's lib or anything of that sort, nothing at all. It is purely health through movement, that's all . . . I didn't even think about anything political then. One was too much involved with getting boyfriends and, of course, one's got sailing, and one plays tennis. You didn't think about politics . . . I doubt if I read the newspaper very much then . . . I was teaching and, you know, your life is pretty full at that time . . .

From an interview with E.T., who began teacher-training with Mollie Bagot Stack in 1930:

She was quite out of the ordinary, Mrs Stack. Exceptionally so. She was somebody you'd never meet again. She was a wonderful person . . . Mrs Stack would never allow you to feel inferior. 'You're equally good with Prunella and Peggy and Joan,' she'd say. I used to be a mouse. Mrs Stack built up my confidence . . . At the end of my training, Mrs Stack asked me into her office. She sat comfortably around the fire, and she said she'd like me to start a centre in Q. I made a face, but Mrs Stack already knew I didn't want to go. She said, 'You don't want to go, do you?' I said, 'Not really'. Mrs Stack leant forward and said, 'But you'll go for me, darling, won't you'. I will always remember that. She could have said, 'You're going and that's that' . . .

'When I was first starting, I think that I was a bit young to think about it deeply. It was later on that I thought about it deeply. We all knew it was 'Racial Health Leading to Peace'. We all knew that. But I don't think it registered with me until I got a little bit older . . .

This is one thing that I think is so good about the League. You get people out of different drawers. All the way down, all being friends together. Some of them cannot speak the Queen's English, really and truly, but they mix in with people who have been quite well educated. And nobody bothers. They're all friendly together. I think that this comes from the teacher, by treating everybody the same yourself and chatting to everybody, top, medium and bottom all together. And then, of course, we have Christmas parties and things like that . . . And everybody calls each other by their Christian name . . . Oh, they do make friends. That's definitely something that goes with the League . . . They stayed because they had such a lot of fun . . . [And the fun is not just the exercises, but the displays and the parties.] That's right, yes. But the exercises, you can make a lot of fun out of the exercises . . .

I have found that when I have advertised in the papers that it hasn't done very much. At the beginning of the season I used to put an advertisement in the local papers, but I find that if you give classes that they enjoy they tell each other and I don't think you need it. I found that a little bit of a waste of money . . .

I think that when you are young and you are in the League as a League teacher, in my day anyway, I think you had to be very careful not to let the League take you away from your husband. You know, you get so enthusiastic about the League. And if you are not careful you get dragged into things that you didn't mean to be dragged into . . . If I had wanted to, I could have been teaching every night of the week. But that would not have been fair on my husband and daughter . . . [But before you were married?] I was teaching Monday night; Tuesday morning, afternoon, night; Wednesday morning, night; Thursday morning, afternoon, part of Thursday night; Friday night; Saturday morning. All those hours . . . We didn't earn very much. I think the most I earned was about £4.50 a week . . .

The Women's League of Health and Beauty was, to its members, a source of friendly, physical fun. They used the League for their own purposes, unconscious of structural determinants, independent of the higher ideals and commercial interests that motivated their leaders. What their own purposes were can be glimpsed in and between the lines of the League magazine and in the well rehearsed stories and shadows of memory in interviews with old members.

The League was established in 1930, at a time of high unemployment, and two years after the culmination of more than 60 years' struggle for women's right to vote. It seems to have attracted members from a pool of young women for whom neither of those events were of very great importance. That pool was the rapidly expanding class of business girls and the modern young mothers that they would become. These were women with small and vulnerable but nonetheless independently disposable incomes. They were mobile city women who were less closely tied to the domestic values and demands of their families than the generations of women before them. They took for granted the rights and freedoms won for them by those generations. They were the first modern generation of women who did not expect to spend their entire adult lives either in motherhood and exclusion from the public world or in rebellion against that exclusion. They were women who could be defined neither in terms of the family, as were their mothers, nor in terms of work, as were their fathers and brothers. They were women of the Machine Age, for whom the machine meant employment, consumer goods, modernity, individuality, pleasure. For these women, the League held out the promise of making them better able to enjoy it all.

With the promise of a new and brighter being went also a commitment to uphold the old values that protected respectability. One did not lose or

damage one's reputation by going to the League. These were not fast or loose women, not rebels or outlaws. Rather, they were conservative progressives on the side of a beauty culture that was winning the struggle to dissociate the cultivation of physical beauty from accusations of narcissistic vanity and sexual abandon.<sup>141</sup> For some members, asserting the importance of the League's broader, political aims of peace and service might have worked to divert such judgments. For others, the emphasis on fitting the body for motherhood and overcoming physical defects served the same end. (This was certainly the case in the development of the League in Australia, where its leader, Thea Stanley Hughes, very quickly dropped the 'and Beauty' suffix, and concentrated on remedial and ante-natal work.)<sup>142</sup> Yet others claimed for themselves without apology the right to a fit, slim, attractive body.

It is *right* that we should hold up our heads, make the best of ourselves, and so contribute to the world's sum of gaiety and beauty. It is right, therefore, to cultivate for all we are worth this desire for an appearance as flawless as we can make it.<sup>143</sup>

The League's success lay in its enthusiastic accommodation of all these needs and desires of its members, as well as of the vision of its leaders. Or, to put it another way, inadvertently the quite differently motivated desires of members and leaders converged in the practice and activities of the League. What the League leaders thought they were offering was not necessarily what the members thought they were receiving. As long as no one demanded conscious dedication to a singular purpose, the discrepancies, even contradictions, could be fruitful.

The very diffuseness of the League's idealistic aims was thus an advantage rather than an obstacle to its popularity. As well as promoting healthy motherhood and universal peace, the League's leaders saw themselves as encouraging in each member a desire to 'find the best and the beauty in all',<sup>144</sup> offering 'opportunities for developing an appreciation of real beauty' and seeking 'to develop good taste and a wide outlook'.<sup>145</sup> Effectively, this meant a programme for uplifting and civilizing lower-middle and (clerical) working-class women. In its earliest issues, the League's magazine published a wide range of articles aimed at personal development: articles on beauty in hands, dress, diet; on cruising holidays; on knitting, etiquette, table setting, grooming and acquiring a magnetic personality; on child development; health hints; theatre, film and book reviews. At classes, members were admonished to follow basic hygiene and grooming practices: washing clothes regularly, having a clean hanky tucked up the left knicker leg, hair and teeth brushing, using a pumice stone, shaving underarms and using a deodorant.<sup>146</sup> The League also provided a number of personal and social services: handwriting analysis, dress patterns, reduced rates for

portraits, reduced fees at a Physical Treatment Clinic near headquarters, parties and cabarets, holiday tours and camps, and a variety of internal clubs – a dramatic club, a swimming club, a choir.

It is hard to assess how successful the 'civilizing' process was. Certainly, the magazine articles had less effect than involvement in organized activities. League leaders regretfully recognized that the magazine was not bought or read by even a majority of members, and for many who did buy it, its value lay only in the reports of other centres, notice of their rallies and parties, and the class timetable.<sup>147</sup> Practical hints were sometimes useful, activities were undertaken if they seemed like fun, but exhortation was largely ignored. Whether in print in the magazine or in face-to-face contact in class, good ideas had considerably less impact than the opportunity to get together; the proclamation of superior values was much less important than the opportunity to gossip; and at least as important as the formal classes was the time before, after and between classes. That is to say, for the members, friendships formed at the League were the key to self-development. Indeed, friendship seems to have been the key to the primary meaning of the League to its members.

The meanings and possibilities of friendship between women in the 1930s were quite new. The nineteenth century 'female world of love and ritual'<sup>148</sup> had largely dissipated, the exclusive and divisive heterosociality to come in the 1950s was not yet dominant. The League made the newness acceptable and comfortable by providing a focus that was safe for women and non-threatening to men. In a period when the standards and certainties of past generations were seen by many young women as old-fashioned and restrictive, but when the fear of loneliness and the dangers of too much freedom made the less adventurous young moderns hesitate, the League offered a slightly daring activity and community of women. The club-like atmosphere of 'League nights' provided members with a sense of belonging, a sense sadly lacking for many women after the end of school days. League classes conducted in shops, institutions and business houses allowed young workers to create a work-based but not employer-controlled network of after-hours leisure. Alternatively, they could join a group that need not be reliant on work or family or neighbourhood contacts. From friendships formed in class could grow closer ties, which could in turn provide opportunities for and protection in heterosocial activities – with friends' brothers, for example – or in homosocial activities, especially of the fan-club variety involving heroine-worship, crushes, and romantic fantasies. In a period of considerable economic dislocation and mobility, and with the expectation that women would always follow their husbands, for young married women the League provided a way to make new friends quickly in a new place. The labour intensity of the service provided at the centres, with pianist, teacher and organizer on hand, meant that in many places babysitting was available. Older children were welcome to join classes in their own right. Young mothers, far distant from the services provided by

their own families and old neighbours, need not be trapped into suburban isolation.

Of course, friendship of all these types was available in different ways in different places. It was a necessary, but not sufficient explanation for the coming together of these 170,000 women. Beyond high ideals and friendship, the crucial ingredient seems to have been that the exercises practised by the League worked. Regular, standardized movement to familiar, popular music made women feel better, more in control of their physical presence in a changing world. The League made good its promise to make of them new women to face the new world: new feminine bodies with new bright personalities. During the day many of them made and tallied and sold the new consumer durables with a life-time guarantee. During the evening they produced for themselves that durable life-time.

The inward and outward spirals of meaning of the League come together here, on each woman's body; a body that felt its own pleasure and acted in the world. By marking, shaping, training each woman's body, the League cultivated in her a new, modern, femininity, connected to but not subsumed by the imperatives of motherhood and modernity. Between the multiple meanings of the League, held by each woman herself as much as by observers, slipped the possibility of moments of autonomous pleasure in that body.

## NOTES

1 Sheila Fletcher, *Women first. The female tradition in English physical education 1880–1980*, London and Dover: The Athlone Press 1984, p. 90.

2 H. Justin Evans, *Service to sport. The story of the CCPR 1935–1972*, London: Pelham Books in association with the Sports Council 1974, p. 29.

3 Evans, *Service to sport*, p. 21; 322 House of Commons Debates Fifth Series, [1936–37] 223.

4 Registered office: Streatham Centre, Dunraven, Leigham Court Road, London SW16.

5 The history of the League has been told several times over by members of the founding dynasty. The founder, Mrs Bagot Stack, published *Building the Body Beautiful. The Bagot Stack Stretch-and-Swing System* (London: Chapman and Hall) in 1931. Her daughter, Prunella, and sister, Mrs A. J. Cruickshank wrote a tribute to Mrs Stack and a history of the League up to 1937, entitled *Movement is Life. The Intimate History of the Founder of the Women's League of Health and Beauty and of its Origin, Growth, Achievements, and Hopes for the Future* (London: G. Bell and Co). Prunella Stack reused the title *Movement is Life* (London: Collins and Harvill) for her 1973 autobiography. Her similarly titled *Zest for Life. Mary Bagot Stack and the League of Health and Beauty* (London: Peter Owen) was published in 1988. There is a considerable overlap in content between all these books, with large sections simply transposed from one to the next. Similarly recycled publications from the League include Mary Bagot Stack's *The Romance of the League* (1934, reprinted 1980, London: WLHB) and Prunella Stack's 1938 pamphlet, *The Way to Health and Beauty* (London: Faber and Faber). From 1933, the League published a magazine under various names: a single issue of *Beauty* in June 1933 was followed by roughly six-weekly issues of *Mother and Daughter* until September 1937 when the name was changed to *Health and Beauty* which appeared until June 1939. Mrs Cruickshank edited the magazines from March 1934.

6 Stack, *Building the Body Beautiful*, p. 3. Over the years of the Stacks telling this story, McCoy eventually became a gynaecologist (Stack, *Zest for Life*, p. 39). He was, in fact, a

palaeontologist, who was appointed foundation professor of natural science at Melbourne University in 1854. (*Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 5 1851–1890, p. 134).

7 Mrs Josef Conn, *Let There Be Light, Mothers!*, London: Farmer and Sons [n.d. 1907], pp. 5–6.

8 Jill Julius Matthews, 'Building the Body Beautiful: The Femininity of Modernity', *Australian Feminist Studies* 5, 1987.

9 Stack, *Building the Body Beautiful*, p. 4.

10 According to her daughter, Mollie Stack had in fact married secretly in 1909. The marriage was not consummated and her husband eventually was persuaded to seek a divorce. (Stack, *Zest for Life*, pp. 43–62). There was never a hint of this scandal in any League publications during the 1930s.

11 Cruickshank and Stack, *Movement is Life*, p. 34.

12 Cruickshank and Stack, *Movement is Life*, p. 38.

13 Stack, *Building the Body Beautiful*, p. viii (ellipsis in original).

14 See *Daily Mail*, 26 Jan 1928; *The Evening News*, 5 June 1928; Eric Muspratt, *Fire of Youth. The Story of Forty-Five Years' Wandering*, London: Gerald Duckworth 1940, p. 76.

15 See 'The Ginner-Mawer School', *The Dancing Times* 180, Sept. 1925, p. 1,329, and Ruby Ginner, 'The Revival of the Greek Dance', *The Dancing Times* 301, Oct. pp. 39–41, 44. Ruby Ginner and Irene Mawer established their school in 1916, and in the inter-war years it became the chief vehicle for the spread of the Revived Greek Dance in England.

16 Stack, *Building the Body Beautiful*, p. 4.

17 'Under the Royal Patronage of HRH The Princess Beatrice Mrs Bagot Stack's Special Matinee in Aid of the City of London Maternity Hospital on Wednesday 17th November 1926 at 3 p.m. at the Comedy Theatre. The many attractive items include Nature Rhythm Hungarian Dances Period Dances Running Friezes Cloud and Sunset Ballet Grecian Marbles Gold Statuettes Coon Dances. (Choreography by Marjorie Duncombe.) A Ballet (Written and Produced by a Child of Twelve.) An explanation and demonstration of exercises for health and slimness. [Tickets range from 10 guineas for boxes to 3/6 in the pit.] Programme file, The Women's League of Health and Beauty Archives (hereafter WLHBA).

18 Muspratt, *Fire of Youth*, pp. 105–108.

19 For example, '6 Articles by Mrs Bagot Stack. Potted Exercises for Beauty', *Daily Telegraph*, 24 March to 28 April 1928; 'How I Train My Daughter', *Daily Express*, 15 Nov to 4 Dec 1928; 'Exercises for Health and Slimness', *Daily Mail*, 27 May to Sept 1930; Press Cutting Book 1928–1931, WLHBA.

20 *The Evening News*, 5 June 1928. Press Cutting Book 1928–31, WLHBA.

21 *Beauty* 1: 1, June 1933, p. 1.

22 *Beauty* 1: 1, June 1933, p. 1; *Mother and Daughter* 2: 19, [n.d. March] 1936, pp. 2,22.

23 Prunella Stack, *Zest for Life*, pp. 154–9.

24 Mary M. Bagot Stack, 'Our League – A Romance in Three Parts', *Beauty* 1: 1, June 1933, p. 9 reprinted in *The Romance of the League 1930–1980*, p. 4.

25 Isadora Duncan, *The Art of the Dance*, edited, with an introduction by Sheldon Cheney, New York: Theatre Art Books 1928, p. 77.

26 *Mother and Daughter* 1: 1, August–September 1933, p. 1.

27 *Beauty* 1: 1, June 1933, p. 1.

28 *Mother and Daughter* 3: 2, [May 1937], p. 9.

29 Cruickshank and Stack, *Movement is Life*, p. 88.

30 Matthews, 'Building the Body Beautiful', p. 21.

31 Stack, *Building the Body Beautiful*, p. 3.

32 Cruickshank and Stack, *Movement is Life*, p. 73.

33 Cruickshank and Stack, *Movement is Life*, p. 239.

34 See e.g., Sheila Jeffreys, 'Sex Reform and Anti-Feminism in the 1920s' in London Feminist History Group, *The Sexual Dynamics of History*, London: Pluto 1983, pp. 177–202. The phenomenon has been more extensively explored in the US: e.g., Ellen Carol DuBois and Linda Gordon 'Seeking Ecstasy on the Battlefield: Pleasure and Danger in Nineteenth-Century Thought' in Carole S. Vance (ed.), *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1983 pp. 31–49; Christina Simmons, 'Modern Sexuality and the Myth of Victorian Repressiveness', in Kathy Peiss and Christina Simmons (eds), *Passion and Power. Sexuality in History*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1989, pp. 157–177.

35 Life Membership Form, c 1937, WLHBA.

36 'Man needs firm abdominal muscles to enable him to take unflinchingly the hard punches that Life is sure to have in store for him if he is to be a he-man. But woman needs elastic muscles which form a natural corset and give internal support, securing her safety and ease in child-bearing. [A]ny form of exercise which produces *tensity* in the abdominal muscles is bad for women.' Stack, *Building the Body Beautiful*, pp. 23–4.

37 Kathleen E. McCrone, *Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women 1870–1914*, London: Routledge 1988, pp. 100–126; Sheila Fletcher, *Women First*.

38 *Mother and Daughter* 1: 6, [April] 1934, p. 12.

39 *Mother and Daughter* 1: 2, [Oct–Nov] 1933, p. 30.

40 Marita Ross, Newspaper Clipping, c. 1937, WLHBA.

41 *Mother and Daughter* 3: 27, [May] 1937, p. 11.

42 *Health and Beauty*, 3: 29, [Sept] 1937, p. 18.

43 Stack, *Building the Body Beautiful*, p. 3.

44 Stack, *Building the Body Beautiful*, p. 3.

45 *Beauty* 1: 1, p. 21.

46 Stack, *Building the Body Beautiful*, p. 24.

47 Mrs Cruickshank, 'Our Health System and Motherhood', *Mother and Daughter* 2: 20, [May] 1936, p. 42.

48 *Mother and Daughter* 1: 3, Christmas 1933, pp. 31–2.

49 Mollie Murdoch report in *Daily Sketch* c. 1938, Newspaper Clipping Book c. 1938, WLHBA.

50 Interviews with League teacher, E.T., London, 14 Jan 1987; and League member, J.B., Essex, 7 Jan 1987. E.T. joined the League in 1930, J.B. in 1934.

51 The very brief exercising uniform was considered inappropriate for parades, getting to and fro, etc. 'Of course, they were a bit prim when they were going to, say, Hyde Park. They used to have little skirts that they wore, and capes. It covered them up a bit, you know, for decency': interview with J.B. 7 Jan 1987, Essex. Nan Stack, Mollie's sister, designed the League's 'outdoor' uniform: *Mother and Daughter* 2: 23, [Oct] 1936, p. 24.

52 '[Mrs Conn's students] used to exercise and demonstrate in black cashmere stockings and black satin bloomers right down to below the knee and long-sleeved high-necked white silk blouses and even then Mrs Conn was considered very 'modern' and slightly indecent because she allowed her students to exercise *without skirts*.' Letter from Freda F. Preece, *Mother and Daughter* 3: 28, [June 1937], p. 9.

53 *Beautycraft* 1: 1–5, Sept 1933–Jan 1934; *Dancing Times* 301, Oct 1935, pp. 135, 137.

54 Interview with J.B.

55 Stack, *Building the Body Beautiful*, p. 14.

56 *Mother and Daughter* 2: 14, [June] 1935, p. 9.

57 Stack, *Building the Body Beautiful*, p. 2.

58 Stack, *Building the Body Beautiful*, p. 4.

59 Stack, *Building the Body Beautiful*, p. 2.

60 Eileen MacMurray Press Clipping Book c. 1926–33, WLHBA.

61 *Daily Mail*, 2 May 1933, MacMurray Clipping Book; Stack, *Romance*, p. 13.

62 Vicki Barter, *History of the League 1930–1980*, London: WLHB Publications Committee 1979, pp. 1–4.

63 Stack, *Romance*, p. 12. The Society of the Sokols was organized in 1862 under the leadership of Dr Miroslav Tyrš. Initially an athletic and gymnastic association of men with covert anti-Hapsburg military motivation, it soon enrolled women and developed as a mass patriotic organization for the social unification of Bohemia. A main feature of its work was mass parades and drill. For example, at the 1932 Sokol Congress in Prague, 65,000 people took part in the great procession and 17,000 women performed rhythmical exercises in unison. Rosita Forbes (ed.), *Women of All Lands: Their Charm Culture and Characteristics*, London: Amalgamated Press, [n.d. 1939], pp. 16–17, 401–2; W. G. Raffe, 'The Sokol Congress at Prague 1932', *Dancing Times* 263, pp. 445–6.

64 Stack, *Movement is Life*, p. 71; Forbes, *Women of All Lands*, pp. 16–18; 401–5.

65 Stack, *Romance*, p. 26.

66 Prunella Stack, *Zest for Life*, p. 109.

67 It is arguable that it is the continuous service of the St Los which has been central to the continued viability of the League throughout its almost 60 years: interviews with WLHB Secretary, Mr. P. J. W. Hutton, London, December 1986, and League teacher, E.T., 14 January 1987.

- 68 Mollie Murdoch, 'Behind the Scenes', *Daily Sketch*, Scrapbook, c. 1939, WLHBA.
- 69 *Mother and Daughter*, 1: 12, [March 1935], p. 8.
- 70 [*Daily Sketch*], 14 June 1937, Jubilee Scrapbook, WLHBA.
- 71 *Dancing Times* 180, Sept 1925, p. 1,247; and 262, July 1932, p. 359.
- 72 See for example, the review of 'The Art of the Body' by Marguerite Agniel in *Beautycraft* 1: 1, Sept 1933, pp. 8–9; or the advertising article on Gaston and Andrée, 'Is Your Body All You Desire?' in *Beautycraft* 1: 9, May 1934, pp. 6–7. Cf., Walter Bird, *Andrée. Britain's Venus*, The New Spotlight on Beauty Series No. 4, London: The Camera Studies Club 1943.
- 73 P.M.C.D., 'Smile, Please!', *Mother and Daughter* 2: 17, Christmas 1935, p. 63.
- 74 Cf. Rita Freedman, *Beauty Bound*, London: Columbus Books 1988, p. 42.
- 75 MacMurray Clipping Book c. October 1930, WLHBA.
- 76 Reprinted in *Mother and Daughter* 1: 3, Christmas 1933, p. 29.
- 77 Jubilee Scrapbook c. 1936–38, WLHBA.
- 78 Miss I. Wilson, Health and Beauty Newspaper Cuttings c. 1938–39, WLHBA.
- 79 *Mother and Daughter* 2: 18, [Feb] 1936, p. 9; 2: 21 [June 1936], p. 15.
- 80 *Health and Beauty* 3: 31, Christmas 1937, p. 11.
- 81 Eileen MacMurray Press Cuttings c. 1933–4, WLHBA.
- 82 *Mother and Daughter* 1: 1, Aug–Sept 1933, p. 36.
- 83 *Mother and Daughter* 1: 1, Aug–Sept 1933, p. 36.
- 84 Marita Ross, Newspaper Clipping c. 1937, WLHBA.
- 85 [*Daily Sketch*] Clipping Book c. 1938, WLHBA.
- 86 *Beauty* 1: 1, June 1933, p. 1.
- 87 *Mother and Daughter* 2: 24, Christmas 1936, p. 9, 10.
- 88 *Health and Beauty* 4: 42, [June 1939], p. 5.
- 89 *Health and Beauty* 3: 36, [Sept 1938], pp. 14–5.
- 90 *Health and Beauty* 4: 40, [March] 1939, p. 6.
- 91 [*Woman's Fair* c. 1936], Jubilee Scrapbook, WLHBA.
- 92 *Beauty* 1: 1, June 1933, p. 21; *Mother and Daughter* 1: 1, Aug–Sept 1933, p. 36.
- Subjects taught in these courses were: the Stretch and Swing System of Exercise, all forms of dancing (Greek, national, tap, mime, ballet, ballroom), public speaking, voice training, organization, anatomy, physiology. In 1936, a new short training course of 6 months consisting of health exercises, health theory, anatomy, physiology, class teaching and public speaking was offered: *Mother and Daughter* 2: 24, Christmas 1936, p. 11. See also, Cruickshank and Stack, *Movement is Life*, pp. 221–27.
- 93 [*Daily Sketch* c. 1939] Newspaper Clipping Book c. 1939; see also 320 HC Debates 5S, 8 Feb 1937, Cols. 99–100 (Mr R. C. Morrison).
- 94 Marita Ross, Newspaper Clipping c. 1937, WLHBA.
- 95 Interview with E.T., 14 Jan 1987.
- 96 Stack, *Movement is Life*, p. 63.
- 97 This representation was given perfect expression in a member's short story, P. O'Donnell, 'A New Member Learns League History', *Mother and Daughter*, 2: 18, [Feb 1936] 1938, p. 27.
- 98 *The Sunday Chronicle*, 25 Sept 1938, Scrapbook c. 1937–41, WLHBA.
- 99 *Sunday Express*, c. 16 Oct 1938, Scrapbook c. 1937–41, WLHBA.
- 100 *Daily Mail*, c. 16 Oct 1938, Scrapbook c. 1937–41, WLHBA.
- 101 Stack, *Building the Body Beautiful*, pp. 1–7.
- 102 *Mother and Daughter* 1: 6, [April] 1934, p. 16.
- 103 *Mother and Daughter* 1: 12, [March] 1935, p. 48.
- 104 *Mother and Daughter* 1: 11, [Feb 1935], p. 35.
- 105 This position was held quite widely among dancers in the decade after the first world war. See, e.g., Margaret Einert, 'Some Dance Impressions of New York, 1925', *Dancing Times* 180, Sept 1925, pp. 1,265–69; Duncan, *Art of the Dance* throughout; John Foster, *The Influences of Rudolph Laban*, London: Lepus Books 1977, pp. 39–69; Elizabeth Selden, *The Dancer's Quest: Essays in the Aesthetic of the Contemporary Dance*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1935, pp. 1–11.
- 106 *Mother and Daughter* 2: 21, [June] 1936, p. 8.
- 107 *Health and Beauty* 3: 33, [March] 1938, p. 9.
- 108 *Health and Beauty* 4: 38, Christmas 1938, p. 31.
- 109 *Health and Beauty* 4: 37, [Oct 1938], p. 6.

- 110 *Health and Beauty* 4: 38, [Christmas 1938], p. 31.
- 111 *Health and Beauty* 3: 42, [June 1939], p. 12.
- 112 Interview with E. T.
- 113 Miss I. Wilson, *Health and Beauty* Newspaper Cuttings c. 1938–39, WLHBA.
- 114 *Health and Beauty* 3: 31, Christmas 1937, p. 19.
- 115 *Mother and Daughter* 2: 15, [Sept 1935], p. 41.
- 116 [*Life* May–June 1937] Scrapbook c. 1937–41, WLHBA.
- 117 322 H of C Debates, 5S [7 April 1937]; 324 H of C Debate 5S [11 June 1937].
- 118 Foster, *Rudolph Laban*, pp. 1–28, 53–62.
- 119 P. Stack, *Movement is Life* p. 71; interview with P. J. W. Hutton. See also Siegfried Kracauer (1927), 'The Mass Ornament', *New German Critique* 5, Spring 1975 pp. 67–76.
- 120 Stack, *Movement is Life*, p. 82.
- 121 *Beautycraft* 1: 1, Sept 1933, p. 1.
- 122 *Beautycraft* 1: 2, Oct 1933, p. 8.
- 123 *Beautycraft* 1: 6, Feb 1934, p. 6; *Dancing Times* 283, April 1934, pp. 77, 79. *Beautycraft* appeared for eleven issues, from Sept 1933 to July 1934; *Life and Beauty* is not listed in either the British Union Catalogue of Periodicals or the British Museum General Catalogue.
- 124 Evans, *Service to Sport*, p. 260.
- 125 *Mother and Daughter*, 3: 26, [March 1937], pp. 25–6.
- 126 *Beautycraft* 1:10, June 1934, p. 46. As usual with 'universal' measures, most of the debate over the Physical Training and Recreation Bill was couched in masculine terms and dealt with masculine concerns. However, in the House of Lords the Bill did excite some eugenist discussion of motherhood and fitness: 103 H of L Debate 5th Series 10 Nov 1937.
- 127 *Health and Beauty* 3: 30, [Oct 1937], pp. 25–6; 36, [Sept 1938], p. 14; 4: 41, [May 1939], p. 16; Stack, *Movement is Life*, pp. 163–4; Stack, *Zest for Life*, pp. 149–151.
- 128 Stack, *Movement is Life*, p. 145; Stack, *Zest for Life*, pp. 149–51.
- 129 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Girls und Krise,' *Frankfurter Zeitung* May 27, 1931, quoted Karsten Witte, 'Introduction to Siegfried Kracauer's "The Mass Ornament"', *New German Critique* 5, Spring 1975, pp. 63–4. See also Helmut Lethen, *Neue Sachlichkeit 1924–1932. Studien zur Literatur des Weissen Sozialismus*, Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche 1970, pp. 43–5; Fritz Giese, *Girlkultur. Vergleiche Zwischen Amerikanischem und Europäischem Rhythmus und Lebensgefühl*. Munchen: Delphin 1925.
- 130 S. Theodore Felstead, *Stars Who Made the Halls. A Hundred Years of English Humour, Harmony and Hilarity*, London: Werner Laurie 1946, p. 104; Ernest Short, *Fifty Years of Vaudeville*, London: Eyre and Spottiswood 1946, p. 131.
- 131 Siegfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1955 (1948), pp. 77–127.
- 132 Giedion, *Mechanization*, p. 106; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, *Kandinsky: Russian and Bauhaus Years 1915–1933*, New York: Guggenheim Museum 1983, pp. 67–69.
- 133 Kracauer, 'Mass Ornament', p. 70.
- 134 *Mother and Daughter*, 3: 28, [June] 1937, p. 13.
- 135 Interview with J.B.
- 136 Mollie Murdoch, [Daily Sketch c. 1939], Scrapbook c. 1939, WLHBA.
- 137 [Daily Express c. 1939], Newspaper Clipping Book c. 1936–37, WLHBA.
- 138 *Mother and Daughter* 2: 23, pp. 23–4.
- 139 *Mother and Daughter* 3: 25, p. 15.
- 140 In 1927, Kracauer published the series 'Die kleinen Ladenmädchen gehen ins Kino' ('The Little Shoppirls Go to the Movies') in *Frankfurter Zeitung*: Witte, 'Introduction', p. 60.
- 141 Matthews, 'Building the Body Beautiful', pp. 26–7.
- 142 Thea Stanley Hughes, *The League of Health in Australia*, Sydney: League of Health, 1961.
- 143 *Mother and Daughter* 1: 3, Christmas 1933, p. 21.
- 144 *Beauty* 1: 1, June 1933, p. 4.
- 145 *Health and Beauty* 4: 41, [May 1939], p. 1.
- 146 Streatham Centre leaflet 'The Body Beautiful', Miss I. Wilson, *Health and Beauty* Newspaper Cuttings, WLHBA.
- 147 E.g. *Mother and Daughter* 2: 17, Christmas 1935, p. 26; 2: 18, [Feb 1936], p. 27; 3: 25, [Feb 1937], p. 24; interview with J.B.; Cruickshank and Stack, *Movement is Life*, pp. 137–8.
- 148 Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, 'The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America', *Signs* 1, 1975–6, pp. 1–29.