

THE ORIGINS OF MODERNISM IN DANCE

by

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ABSTRACT

Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis are well-known among dance historians as the 'pioneers' of modern dance. With their novel dance styles they offered the first alternatives to both the classical ballet and the entertaining variety dance of the day. What has not been clearly understood, however, is the unique social, cultural and artistic background in early twentieth century America which stimulated the concurrent development of three innovative dancer-choreographers. In this thesis I have examined the early stage careers of Fuller, Duncan and St. Denis to illustrate the connection between the development of early modern dance and the rise of popular culture in America. In an era that witnessed increased industrialization, urbanization and the possibilities of mass advertising, it was the new popular trends in literature, fashions, paintings, posters, social dance and stage entertainment which influenced the origins of both image and movement expressed in the early choreographic works of these dancers.

The study involved an historical examination of the immediate cultural and social environment of these choreographers. A wide variety of books and magazines, early program notes and reviews were used to give an accurate picture of their historical context and to show their involvement with the popular forms of entertainment at this time.

In order to relate this historical material to the choreography of these dancers it was necessary to focus on three of their early works, Fuller's Serpentine, Duncan's Iphigenia in Aulis, and St. Denis' Radha. Through an analysis of the movement and imagery in each of these dances it was possible to show the ways in which popular influences had begun to lay the groundwork for an emerging tradition of Modernism in dance. Characteristics such as the freeing of the torso, the reduction of storyline and decor, and a new attention to movement itself as the primary focus of dance were elements that were later developed more fully by choreographers such as Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Merce Cunningham.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

At the turn of the twentieth century, American painters and writers opposed to the prevalent sentimentality and idealization in art were moving towards Realism and Naturalism. During this same time three young women, Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis, began to attract public attention with their neo-romantic aesthetic and interpretive dance. Performing barefoot and in loosely draped often revealing costumes, they gathered audiences as varied as vaudeville regulars, elite artists, society ladies intrigued by novelty and voyeurs in search of a "well-turned" leg. With a return to the spirit of nature as a basis for movement, these dancers, unlike artists such as Stephen Crane, Edith Wharton, William Dean Howells and The Eight Group, ignored the growing industrialization of society and exalted a romantic spirit. Uncorseted, statuesque and vibrant, Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis reflected the image of the new American woman in pursuit of fresh air, exercise and the arts.

The influence of these three women on the development of modernism in dance was revolutionary and far-reaching. With their novel dance styles they offered the first alternatives to both the classical ballet and the entertaining variety dance of the day. What has not been clearly understood, however, is the

unique social, cultural and artistic background in early twentieth century America which stimulated the concurrent development of three innovative dancer-choreographers. Any dance historian who attempts to trace the influences which fashioned the dance styles of Fuller, Duncan and St. Denis will find that it is a difficult task to follow their progression from dancers in a corps, to vaudeville soloists, to artists acclaimed across Europe.

Until recently dance history has tended towards biographical treatments of these modern dance pioneers and largely ignored the artistic and cultural context of their work. This method of historical reporting has often led to fragmented accounts which tend to eulogize the dancers rather than document the development of the new dance form. Statements such as the following, while full of enthusiasm for Duncan's iconoclasm do little to provide a context for her artistic innovations:

What Beethoven is to modern music, what Walt Whitman is to poetry, Isadora Duncan is to modern dance--the first great romanticist, the first apostle of freedom and democracy in her art, the liberator from sterile conventions.¹

In addition, the early modern dancers, in their autobiographies, often present even more outrageous accounts than their historians. Isadora Duncan, for example, proclaimed that she first began to dance in her mother's womb "a result of the oysters and champagne...the food of Aphrodite."²

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Few historians have thoroughly investigated the intricate network of social, cultural and artistic patterns that influenced these dancers. An exception, Olga Maynard, attempts to place "the dance within its eras, parallel with other trends in society and the arts."³ Though not always carefully documented, the work of this author is nevertheless more informative than Walter Terry's misleading assertion that Miss Ruth, "with no precedents in formulating a new dance, with nothing to copy, with hardly a clue, revealed a new world of dance...unaided."⁴ Without a more comprehensive study of the interrelationships involved in the development of the personal dance style of each of these dancers, an understanding of the roots of modernism in dance is extremely limited.

The matter of modernity in dance was a puzzlement to John Martin, and it was he who first raised my interest in pursuing its complex origins.

It is by contagion rather than logic that the word 'modern' has got itself attached to the particular type of dance which has come to life as a characteristic American expression. The modern movement in general, embracing music and painting and literature, was enjoying the full flush of its triumph over middle class smugness before the revival of interest in the dance as a creative medium had gathered force enough to be noticed. The comparative unimportance of this particular art in the public mind has been of inestimable value to its development, for if it has been forced to blush unseen, it has also been allowed to grow unmolested. When it finally grew into a certain maturity and came inevitably into general vision it found itself somehow automatically associated with those other insurgencies which had preceded it in popular notice.⁵

Martin suggests here that the new American dance form did not develop through a systematic association with the other continental modern art movements, and expresses surprise that modernism in dance found itself "somehow automatically associated" with these other art forms.

While failing to explore these suggestions of a unique modernist history in dance, Martin does raise several important questions which serve to focus this discussion concerning the roots of modernism in dance. First, if modern dance arose separated in time and place from the other modern art movements, what were the major differing influences which contributed to and distinguished its growth? Second, why was its development such a poorly documented historical event? And finally, what were the primary elements in the works of Fuller, Duncan and St. Denis which began to define the notion of modernism in dance?

In attempting to answer these questions we can begin to see an astonishing connection between the development of early modern dance and the rise of popular culture in America. In an era that witnessed increased industrialization, urbanization and the possibilities of mass advertising, it was the new popular trends in literature, fashions, paintings, posters, social dance and stage entertainment which influenced the origins of both image and movement expressed in the early dances of Fuller, Duncan and St. Denis.

In a discussion of these influences on modern dance we need not rely solely on impressions gleaned from the numerous biographies and autobiographies of these women. To observe and obtain evidence from the dance, rather than the dancer, I have chosen to examine three well-known choreographed works from each artists' early years; dances which were popular with audiences and therefore long-lived in their respective repertoires.

Films of Loie Fuller's Serpentine, Ruth St. Denis' Radha and Isadora Duncan's Iphigenia in Aulis proved indispensable in forming the groundwork of this study. In the case of Duncan, who never allowed herself to be filmed, I have used a reconstruction performed by Hortense Kooluris, a well-known dancer in the Duncan style. Reviews, scrapbooks and newspaper clippings, old programs, interviews and photographs furnished further information regarding particulars such as audience response, concert programming, stage setting and costumes.

The dance analyses, presented in Appendix I, are simply constructed to make the dances accessible to the layperson and the movement specialist. The observations of each film were made with a special handviewer in order to break down the dance frame by frame, as well as with the usual automated film projector to add an accurate sense of timing, and musicality. Each analysis is divided into three sections. Column A presents the verbal dance reconstruction while Columns B and C select and identify specific components of each dance which will be further examined

in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

These analyses will examine the use of imagery and characteristic movement in the dances of the early pioneers. Movement may be defined as the process of changing the place or position of the body, both postural and gestural, while image refers to a representational shape occurring in an instant of time. As both movement and image interrelate in each compositional work, these two categories form the headings of Columns B and C respectively, indicating the distinctive details which characterize a specific dance.*

The second stage in this study concerning the roots of modernism in dance involves an historical examination of the immediate cultural and social environment of the three dancer-choreographers. A wide variety of books and magazines were used in the search for prime factors which influenced the stylistic motifs dictated in Columns B and C of the dance analyses (Appendix I). These sources include literature detailing American interest and development (1850-1910) in vaudeville and theatre, mass printing and lithography, fashion and advertising, as well as specific trends in mysticism and the Orient, cultural-health, social dance and the Americanized Delsarte movement. I have emphasized urban rather than rural conditions because in this period the city was the

* (See Appendix I) The following discussion will draw from Appendix I and continual references to it will be made throughout this thesis.

focus of the newly emergent mass culture. New York is particularly important, as it is here that Fuller, Duncan and St. Denis came to promote their stage careers, leaving their respective birthplaces of Fullersburg, Illinois, Oakland, California and Newark, New Jersey.

Recent biographical articles by several dance scholars tend to support the view that popular culture was a significant influence on the works of these dancer-choreographers. Suzanne Shelton, writing on the early career of Ruth St. Denis, affirms that "the physical culture movement in America, the variety stage and popular spectacles provided the climate in which Ruth St. Denis' art was born."⁶ In her discussion Shelton illustrates that the American advocates of Francois Delsarte's theories of expression,* including Genevieve Stebbins and Steele McKaye, drastically altered the Delsartian philosophy as it was taught in Europe. The "Delsartian gospel" in America is described as a practical approach, which overlapped with the self-help movements and opened the way for expansion into "health and hygiene, exercise, and gymnastics, statue posing and dress reform."⁷

Other vogues such as the growing interest in Oriental mysticism at the turn of the century are mentioned by Christina Schlundt as probable keys to understanding "the St. Denis

* For detailed discussion concerning Francois Delsarte's theories of dramatic expression see Chapter 4.

experience." Schlundt frequently quotes from Hal Bridges who, in his discussion of Vedanta and Zen Buddhism during the American 1890's, points out the growing numbers of "the near mystical and the pseudo mystical, the initiators and followers of the popular enthusiasm and fads..."⁸ Nesta Macdonald, in discussing some of the lesser known aspects of Duncan's life, explains how she played bit parts in a variety of Augustin Daly productions, singing and dancing her way through The Geisha, Meg Merrilees, Midsummer Night's Dream and As You Like It. Even more significant was Duncan's encounter and resulting infatuation with the music of Ethelbert Nevin which according to Macdonald was "much to the popular taste of the time."⁹

Sally Sommer directly draws on Fuller's early affiliations with the popular stage as a kind of aesthetic foundation upon which Fuller would base her own theatrical concepts. Pantomime-spectacles which relied on "sensational images"¹⁰ modulated by spectacular lighting effects, are proposed by Sommer as influential factors in Fuller's artistic development. Such plays incorporated a variety format, in which actes de ballet, songs and dance were combined with startling scenic transformations.* It is to Loie Fuller's background in such forms of mass entertainment that Sommer encourages us to look; a world where panoramas, phantasmagorias and magic lantern shows

* In 1887, Alfred Thompson's exotic spectacle, Alladin, featured Loie Fuller backed by the Imperial Burlesque Company.

were popular, and stage productions emphasized the marvels of scenic transformations through the developing craft of lights and gauze projected onto changing objects and forms.

Dance scholars such as Suzanne Shelton, Christina Schlundt, Nesta Macdonald and Sally Sommer are apparently aware of certain influences which popular culture had on these individual dancers. It is in these biographical studies that we learn of the young Isadora who met Augustin Daly while dancing in a beer garden or Ruth St. Denis who made her solo debut in the vaudevillean Hudson Theatre. However in order to more fully examine the effects of popular culture on the origins of modern dance it will be necessary to focus on not one, but all three of the acclaimed modern dance pioneers. We need, in effect, to retrace the paths of Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis who, working individually and at different times during the two prime decades, (1890-1910), initially performed on the popular stages of either Chicago or New York and later refined their dance styles in England, France, Germany and other foreign countries. Although references may be made to their continental years, it is primarily the formative years in America which will be the emphasis of this paper. Admittedly, their latter experiences are easier to trace as growing involvements with other artists resulted in considerable documentation in the form of poems, paintings, graphics and sculptures concerning the dancers. Yet, it is their early stage development traceable in

odd magazines or books on vaudeville or health culture, as well as early program notes and reviews that reveals the prime influencing factors and process of consolidation involved in the creation of an "individual" dance style.

CHAPTER TWO

Popular Culture in America

Popular culture, the business of amusing and entertaining the great body of common people, emerged after the American Civil War.* Between the years 1820 and 1890* America's rapidly growing economy, marked by increased industrialization, transportation and migration, had drastically altered the urban environment. In the Northeastern United States population in the cities rose from 567,000 to 14,867,000.¹ By 1890, fifty-eight percent of the population in Northeastern America and sixty-five percent in New York state was located in the cities.

This new urban society had much more leisure time and much * more disposable income; it needed a new art, neither folk nor elite. The roots of popular culture, according to Alfred McLean, Jr., "lay deep in the experience of millions who had swarmed into the American cities...who sought images, gestures and symbols which would objectify their experience and bring to their lives a simple and comprehensive meaning."² Another

* Actually, the first popular theatre, New Bowery opened in New York on the eve of the Civil War. However, it is not until after the war that the proliferation of theatres begins.

* The period 1820-1890, according to Ann Douglas in The Feminization of American Culture, marks the initial commercialization of American culture, most notably the revolution in printing, the use of nationally circulated newspapers and magazines and the popularization of the stage.

writer, Russell Lynes, explains that "when Andrew Jackson was elected to the presidency in 1828 on a wave of cocksure Americanism there came with him not only a new 'age of the common man' but the beginnings of what I would like to call the Age of the Public Taste. Taste became everybody's business and not just the business of a cultured few."³

From the time of early settlement America's ideological tradition was characterized by diversity rather than homogeneity. Robert Toll suggests that these beginnings of mass culture evolved out of the struggle between the artistic elite who envisioned a cultural renaissance in which American artists would bring European forms to new heights, and the 'middling' American who sought native forms, symbols, and institutions to express 'the common man's culture.' "In response, traditional cultural media, like newspapers, literature and stage entertainment, tried to satisfy the basically conflicting demands of both groups. Almost inevitably entertainment in America fragmented into "highbrow" and "lowbrow"--elitist and popular. Out of the turmoil came unequivocally popular forms that were both products and responses to the way common America transformed old cultural institutions."⁴

Documentation of this newly developing industry of popular culture is difficult. The forces which propelled it were as numerous and widespread as its audiences. Much of its early growth took place in unnoticed, backroad localities including

salcons, taverns, beer gardens and numerous small presses.

Music halls, free and easies, concert saloons, provided an opportunity to drink in the garish atmosphere created by music, scantily dressed girl waitresses, and beautiful entertainers. Chicago, which liked to call itself the Paris of America, had scores of these places, but New York really held unchallenged leadership. In 1898, the police of Gotham listed ninety-nine amusement resorts, including saloons with music and entertainment on the Bowery alone.⁵

Popular culture may be defined as "a set of art forms * characterized by wide popularity and an emphasis on recreational or entertainment values."⁶ It covers a vast number of activities from the daily newspaper to certain architectural trends, from the Chautauquan lecture platform to touring theatre and variety troupes. A pertinent characteristic pointed out by historians Robert R. Roberts, Carl Bode and Leo Lowenthal is its derivative nature; its "repetition of given facts with the use of borrowed tools."⁷

Vaudeville at one time or another brought just about every form of entertainment under its umbrella, even brief glimpses of name stars from the legitimate stage. Working on the vaudeville stage afforded a wide variety of influences including borrowed acts from across the Atlantic. Sarah Bernhardt created a sensation in 1895 when she appeared on the stage of the Providence Theatre in short scenes from La Tosca and Cleopatra. Ruth St. Denis, in her autobiography An Unfinished Life, recalls being influenced by Bernhardt's "picturesque posings" in an old melodramatic production of The Sorcerer, in New York.⁸

Constantly searching for ways to diversify the standard acts, "agents were quickly dispatched to Europe to locate new attractions for American palates. As a result of one of these expeditions the Skirt Dance was imported from London Music Halls."⁹ In a similar fashion, Nautch and Danse du Ventre were introduced to the American public from the Far East. Both of these acts, incorporated into the variety show format, were to have a great effect on the dances of Loie Fuller and Ruth St. Denis.

It is difficult to comprehend popular arts' wide sphere of influence during the nineteenth century, particularly the later decades, without a closer look at the growth rate and increased marketability of these industries. ⁽¹⁾ Magazine and book printing, ⁽²⁾ ^(popular entertainments) variety shows (later called vaudeville) and ⁽³⁾ ^(theatrical) the Chautauquan health-culture movement provide a good cross-section of performing and non-performing popular arts which influenced cultural America.

By the late nineteenth century continual advances in printing technology made possible the cheap production of books, periodicals and posters which were disseminated to a growing American literate populace. In the magazine industry the number of publications increased from 700 in 1865 to 3,300 in 1885, and circulation figures showed corresponding increases.¹⁰ Women's magazines and weeklies featuring primarily melodrama, tearful narratives with a sprinkling of poetry, anecdote, curiosa and

fashions swamped the market with journals such as Harper's Bazaar (1867), McCall's (formerly The Queen, 1870), Farm Journal (1880), and Ladies' Home Journal (1889).

Massive amounts of popular literature, including pirated editions of English authors, were printed as the annual output of books in America doubled by 1890, and again tripled by 1900.¹¹ Frank Luther Mott, author of Golden Multitudes; the Story of Best Sellers in America denotes the literature of the sixties and seventies as "fiction of sentiment" later leading into the popular "high romance"* which constituted "half the top best sellers of the year, [1894-1902]."¹²

Beadle, and other dime novels--cheap paper books generally known for their low-level fiction--also flourished at this time. Publishers such as Donnelly, Lloyd & Company who started with semi-monthly quartos were quickly surpassed by others, including George Munro of the Seaside Library series who began daily publication of such books.

The Grolier Club in New York, as part of an exhibition of One Hundred and Fifty Influential Books Printed before 1900, listed the ten most popular books as:

1. Maleska, the Indian Wife of the White Hunter, Anna Sophia Stephens.
2. The first of the Beadle Dime Novels.
3. Snow Bound, John Greenleaf Whittier.

* The year 1894 saw the publication of a new procession of romantics: 1. The Prisoner of Zenda, Anthony Hope; 2. Under the Red Robe, Stanley J. Weyman; 3. John March Southerner, George W. Cable; 4. Warning's Peril, Captain Charles King.

4. Little Women, Louisa May Alcott.
5. Ragged Dick, Horatio Alger.
6. The stories of Bret Harte.
7. Montgomery Ward's mail order catalogue.
8. Science and Health, Mary Baker Eddy.
9. The Leavenworth Case, Anna Katherine Green.
10. Progress and Poverty, Henry George.¹³

Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt states that "much fourth rate fiction ranked high among popular favourites and ... the decades after the Civil War were inferior in creative strength to the years that had gone before and, most assuredly to the years ahead."¹⁴

The theatrical arts also reflected a change towards democratic, popular tendencies. As in the field of literature, serious artists of the theatre continued to draw specialized audiences while burlesque, comic opera, melodrama, minstrel shows, spectacles and dioramas attracted the broad-based lower and middle social and economic groups.

The spectacular rise of vaudeville is indicative of the growing interest in popularized entertainment. As early as 1842 variety shows existed in which several different acts were consolidated into regular performances. The Franklin Theatre in New York, for example, presented a program of magic lantern slides, comic lectures, chemistry, French plays, mesmeric clairvoyance and beautiful arithmetical diagrams. More often than not, these shows were oriented towards a male audience featuring rather risqué, scantily clad nymphs.

In 1881, when Tony Pastor opened the Fourteenth Street Theatre offering "polite," "refined," legitimate or family

entertainment the audience attendance increased sharply, drawing women and children as well as the usual male spectator.

Vaudeville (a term first coined in 1881) took over the acts performed in saloons and beer gardens and cleaned them up. By the mid 1880's vaudeville was easily the most popular form of theatrical entertainment.

The astounding growth and popularity of vaudeville can be determined by the size of vaudeville theatres, their large number, the attendance, the proliferation of the theatres and their enormous profits. Albert MacLean, in a study of American vaudeville, ascertained that fourteen to sixteen per cent of the urban population attended vaudeville once a week.¹⁵ In addition, large vaudeville houses with capacities of 12,000-20,000 and gross incomes of \$20,000 per week proliferated in the decades following 1890. During this time New York City sported a growth from seven to thirty-one variety theatres while Chicago added sixteen to their "vaude" listings. A comparative survey sponsored by the Russell Sage Foundation illustrates the firm base vaudeville held in American culture, with weekly receipts totalling \$315,000 from low-priced variety shows topping the \$190,000 income of high priced theatres.¹⁶

In addition to the popularization of art forms such as theatre and literature, there arose in America a widespread interest in health and physical culture, an interest which found its culmination in the Chautauqua movement (1874-1924).

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Chautauqua grew even larger than the earlier Lyceum self improvement system which, by 1850, was supporting three thousand lyceums. 7118

Summer session programs which started on the shores of Lake Chautauqua, New York, offered studies in music, dramatic interpretation, lecture, oratory, stereopticon views and physical culture. Tent or circuit Chautauquas were well established by 1900, and thirty-one states boasted their own pavilions or perhaps a half a dozen of them.¹⁷ This latter trend towards expansion can be described as the commercialization and standardization of Chautauqua for the purpose of taking it on the road. This development led to some degradation of its content since pure entertainment attractions gradually supplanted most of the educational programs.

Before then, Chautauquas were places where lecturers, physical culture & drama are presented. Later Chautauquas became more commercialized. (L) pure entertainment.

What originally started as a program of Sunday School pedagogy in 1866 evolved into a travelling circuit which offered popular education courses with a particular emphasis on so-called "culture." Sousa's marches and Stephen Foster's songs were played between orchestrations of Bach, Handel, Mendelssohn or Wagner. Bird whistlers, bell ringers, and singers who drew cartoons shared the stage with plays as diverse as Hamlet, Madame Butterfly, The Mikado, Peter Pan, Robin Hood or the popular melodrama Turn to the Right.

Therefore, it is not unusual that the Chautauquan tradition, an intermix of 'high and low-brow' art, readily

incorporated into its curriculum of events the physical culture and health movement, with its Americanized, popularized version of Delsarte's philosophy of expression. Within this Chautauqua circuit the American Applied Aesthetics of Delsarte "spread like wildfire across the continent,"¹⁸ moving outwards from its original base in New York where the major exponents Steele MacKay and Genevieve Stebbins actively lectured, taught and performed.

It is difficult to know how many Americans flocked to the tent Chautauquas and camped on the grounds next to the pavilion. But according to Victoria and Robert Case's study of the physical culture at least "twenty million living Americans remember Chautauqua mostly with nostalgic vividness."¹⁹

In discussing these three aspects of popular culture in America I have negelected to mention the enormous expansion involved in industries such as lithography, fashion and advertising. Indeed it would require several books to detail the rise and growth of each of these movements in America. Suffice it to say, that in the late nineteenth century various forms of culture were made readily available to the large masses of middle class Americans. This rapidly expanding mass market brought with it a certain set of trends, ideas, morals and images which became infused into everyday American life. It should come as no surprise then, in a country with no established tradition in dance, that its first innovative

dancers would emerge from and reflect the forms and conditions of this popular culture.

CHAPTER THREE

The Vaudeville Influence

Born into an era when "variety fever" was reaching its height, Fuller, Duncan and St. Denis in their early careers resembled the new type of star who dazzled and charmed audiences with a minimum of traditional professional training and a maximum of raw energy and vitality. Women headliners such as Eva Tanguay, Nora Bayes, Gertrude Hoffman, Elsie James, Bessie Clayton and Lillian Russell advertised their personalities in high-spirited acts of song and dance.

Single Women! The most dazzling act on any bill was the Single woman, the personality-plus gal...She appeared to upbeat music and kept the mood of her act that way, rendering ballads, ragtime and at late evening shows an occasional risqué song--all interspersed with bright patter.¹

A major influence in this popularization of the dancing girl and the display of legs was the 1866 production of The Black Crook, a spectacle of music and ballet woven together in a thin melodramatic plot. European ballerinas Marie Bonfanti and Rita Sangalli were imported to dance the solo roles before an American public only vaguely familiar with this continental art. It was a success. In fact, the show ran almost continuously for thirty years, picking up countless American girls and hastily training them for the corps de ballet.

Spectacles featuring dance, in the tradition of The Black Crook, continued through the eighties and nineties with the multitude of Kiralfy Brothers productions: Hickory Dickory Dock, Around the World in Eighty Days, Fall of Rome, etc. Oddly enough, vaudeville shows benefited from the popularity of these spectacles since dancing girls, including Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis, frequently stepped out of the corps de ballet to take solo spots in variety acts. Vaudeville, as a result, with its intermix of clog, jig, skirt, square, exotic, soft-shoe and ballet became a unique spawning ground for new and different combinations of dance forms.

Ruth St. Denis, in her autobiography, recalls these early vaudeville days:

I danced to a piece called 'Gavotte d'Amour'. However, to me it was not a gavotte of love, but of backbends and cartwheels which I interspersed with many flourishes...²

And Isadora Duncan recollects dancing to a popular piece called The Washington Post, a musical score renowned for the frolicking social two-step of the same name.*

The music started up and I did my best to give that manager a peppery dance, improvising as I went. He was simply delighted, took the cigar out of his mouth and said,
"That's fine! You can come on tomorrow night and I'll have a special announcement."³

* According to Philip Richardson, in The Social Dances of the Nineteenth Century, the two step "was danced everywhere for one season in 1894."

During this era, vaudeville entertainers featured short novelty acts with distinct audience appeal. In dance the sexy allure of the costumes was often enough to spark audience interest. Joe Laurie, Jr., a vaudeville star and variety columnist, describes Loie Fuller's first appearance as a solo dancer:

After about three years of seeing medium and ankle length costumes, the customers got to longing for a peep at the undraped figure, so when Loie Fuller dressed in a full length transparent skirt, came into the spotlight with her Serpentine dance, Miss Fuller and the dance jumped into favour.*

Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis continued this daring display of leg in the Greek and Eastern influenced costumes which they adopted for their respective stage personae. The Globe and Commercial Advertiser in 1906 announced the attraction of A Bare Legged Dancer:

Wild stories of their shocking suggestiveness, coupled with society's O.K. drew a great crowd of curious folk yesterday to see the East Indian dances of Ruth St. Denis. Every seat in the gallery, balcony, and pit was occupied, scores stood in the aisles and lobby, and scores went away because nothing but standing room was for sale. All of which goes to show what a powerful box office is Dame Rumour.⁵

↑ considered bold on the time.

A continual search for diversification and spectacle was in itself, a trademark of vaudeville. New acts and combinations of acts were continually being evolved or borrowed, in order to please audiences who had an insatiable desire for novelty. When Ruth St. Denis performed Radha and other Hindu dances in 1906, the New York Times announced:

Society has discovered something new under the limelight. Out of the jaws of vaudeville a group of New York women who still keep a weary eye out for up-to-date novelties, have snatched a turn which they hope to make more or less of an artistic sensation. A set of Hindu dances performed by a New Jersey girl with a rather convincingly clear notion of what she is doing constitutes this find.⁶

In order to maintain a high level of audience interest, these variety shows presented a large number of entertainment acts in rapid succession. Thus, each act featured only a small group of performers and was also relatively short in duration. The early modern dancers remained soloists during their careers and developed a short, lyric dance form in their later works. In effect, a new format for dance concerts was established. Unlike the evening length ballets which evolved around a single theme, the modern dance concerts consisted of several shorter dances of variant themes. Surely the eclecticism of these variety shows would account for the diversity of styles and themes which emerged in the work of these three dancers. This will become more clear as we examine some of the details of their early choreography.

Probably one of the most readily noticeable characteristics of early modern dance, particularly in the works of Isadora Duncan, is the incorporation of well-known social dance steps

into the movement style. In The Technique of Isadora Duncan, Irma Duncan has structured twelve exercises to illustrate the basis of dance, which evolved out of Isadora's principles. Lessons ten and eleven, "The Waltz" and "The Polka", are designated dance steps "par excellence, as a basis for movement with arms, head and body."⁷

"Make a waltz step forward with the right foot. Turn to the right and step backward with the left foot. As you turn, raise the right arm in a curve over your head. Turn again to the right with a waltz step on the right foot, as you hold the right arm forwards, etc."⁸

As seen in Appendix I, Iphigenia in Aulis exemplifies the use of the waltz step as a transitional element which reappears six times throughout this dance.

The Skirt Dance has often been described as a compromise between classical ballet and the popular step-dance. This latter social dance form is the source of the famous 'peddle step,' a small vertical step which causes the body to bob up and down with a transfer of weight. Such a step is readily apparent in Fuller's Serpentine and St. Denis' Radha, sections II and VI respectively. A newspaper clipping, written March 23, 1890, in America, documents the distinctive characteristics of The Real Skirt Dance:

No eccentricity of the erratic fancy of theatre goers who find amusement in the lighter forms of theatrical entertainment is quite so marked as the rage of the hour for that curious form of feminine pedal gymnastics which has become known as the 'Gaiety Skirt Dance' whose chief characteristics are its bewildering methods of bifurcated skirt-swinging and its spectacular excess of

high-kicking. The original skirt dance was introduced in this city when the Gaiety Theatre Co....made its debut about a year and a half ago at this Standard Theatre, and brought forward Miss Sylvia Grey and Miss Letty Lind as the leading exponents of the fine art of fancy dancing.⁹

The skirt dance became so popular at the turn of the century that it was taught as a ballroom technique, and entered the popular realm of social dance. In an interview with Ruth St. Denis we learn of one of her earliest dance debuts. Dressed in a reconstructed ballroom dress, she accompanied her mother to New York to seek an audition for her "little skirt dance ... It was sufficiently good to win an engagement at Worth's, followed by another at Hermann's."¹⁰

The reintroduction of the long, flowing skirt initiated a change in movement which was often deemed suggestive of dances of antiquity:

The Skirt Dance broadened the scope of dancing. In itself never a performance of very great artistic merit, it had all the value of a revolt. It broke down the dominion of a tradition which had become narrow. It opened up new vistas. It contained the seeds of future movements. In particular it recalled the forgotten dances of antiquity. Though essentially modern, and notably so in its lapses into vulgarity, it nevertheless suggested new possibilities in the grace of flowing drapery, the value of the line, the simplicity and naturalness that were characteristic of Greek dance.¹¹

More than anyone else Loie Fuller was able to discover the choreographic possibilities inherent in this popular dance. Serpentine, like the skirt dance, was dependent for its effect on the manipulation of flowing materials. In 1889, Fuller was

Letty Lind's understudy as Mercedes in Carmen-up-to-Data, and as her replacement must have learned some version of her special dance.¹² It is no wonder then, that in the 1892 play Quack, M.D., at the Harlem Opera House, Fuller chose a silky, voluminous skirt to improvise the movement scene involving a young widow under hypnotic suggestion. The interplay of theatrical lighting on the moving silk skirt in this particular scene became the basis of Serpentine dance.

When first auditioning for the vaudeville stage as a solo dance act, Loie Fuller had not yet named her movement sequence but only classified the "twelve characteristic motions"¹³ designed to take place under different coloured lights. In fact, it was the Casino Theatre director who gave Fuller's luminescent skirt dance the name Serpentine and also underscored it with a popular piece of music, Gillet's Loin du Bal.

After it was first introduced, this dance, which featured the manipulation of a great skirt creating curvilinear patterns in space, and which was often described as fleetingly representational of natural images, underwent much elaboration.

Not only were various harmonies of colour thrown upon the dress, but also strange and wonderful patterns of flowers and lace and barbaric designs. The variety of effects thus obtained were endless. At one moment the skirt was a moving wave of rose-pink; the next it had changed to a dark purple on which gleamed golden stars; afterwards it took the design of a Japanese embroidery; and again it became a flame of fire burning in the darkness. And not content with these bewildering displays some of those whose business it is to refine upon vulgarity devised a startling and terrible

novelty--they utilized the dancer as a backcloth and projected upon her photographs of the prominent people of the day."¹⁴

Carl Van Vechten, one of America's first dance critics, describes the exaggeration of the skirt "to insane proportions, one hundred yards of enveloping silk exercised by iron rods into terrific aerial excesses."¹⁵ Loie Fuller's employment of wooden sticks as limb extensions for manipulating her draped costumes was a technique derived from Japanese theatre. In her latter years in Paris, following the mounting public interest in Far Eastern culture, Fuller actually brought the Japanese dance-dramatist Sadi Yacco and company to her theatre for a year long engagement.

Throughout all of these changes in Serpentine, specific movements such as the previously mentioned "peddle step" as well as the "waltz movement" first introduced by Alice Lethbridge, remained remarkably similar in their execution. Section V of Fuller's dance, where, after completing a half turn, she arches backwards until her head and upper torso are completely visible, recalls Mark Perugini's description of Alice Lethbridge's "lovely revolving movements, as when, in dancing the ordinary waltz, she leant back until the upper half of her body was nearly horizontal and then rotated round herself..."¹⁶ In Radha's Dance of Touch and Delirium of the Senses, Ruth St. Denis displays a more acrobatic version of this backward arch, a variation which was as much a typical vaudeville novelty as the

splits and high kick.

In an article concerning The Rise of the Musical Comedy in America, Arthur Todd suggests that the origins of the skirt dance may be traced to the East Indian Nautch influence. The Nautch and Danse du Ventre were popularized dances of the Far East which also featured the skirt as a flowing frame to enhance bodily movements. In Delirium of the Senses, the sixth section of Radha, Ruth St. Denis dons a gold skirt and drapes it coquettishly over her shoulders as a sari while delicately portraying Eastern influenced hand symbols reminiscent of the Nautch dance. The sequence which follows involves the manipulation of the undulating skirt while peddle-turning. All of these elements are characteristic of the Nautch dance. In a 1906 New York Times review of Ruth St. Denis, the popularity of her Hindu dances is related to a general fascination with the Orient.

The fascination of the Orient is eternal. Women's clubs that have sipped tea over pretty much everything from Sun Worship to Mental Science generally fall back on Eastern lore for things to be enthusiastic about. The 'Road to Mandalay' is ankle deep with the papers of progressive reading societies.¹⁷

Accounts of Arabic and East Indian dancers in America exist as early as 1876, at the eleventh and Wood Street House, a variety hall managed by Harry Drew.

The group consisted of three men and two women; the men the musicians, the women the dancers. The men sat on the floor; one played an Armenian pipe, another a kind of violin, the third a tabor or small drum which he beat

with his hands in the manner of a swing band brass slapper. The women wore short skirts and a silken band bound their breasts. Their feet, in fact, the rest of their bodies were bare.¹⁸

Originally distinctive in their form, dances such as the Nautch and Danse du Ventre melded together in American vaudeville under a multitude of names--Oriental, harem, hootchie-kootchie, cooch, shimmy and tassle. One might easily speculate that this form of exotic dancing inspired the later vogue for "bare-footed" dancing, which included Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis as major exponents.

The original outburst of interest in "exotics" of the Orient which first began in 1865, subsided until the mid-1880's when Gilbert and Sullivan's Mikado and J.H. Haverly's Colossal Japanese Show of jugglers, tumblers and necromancers from 'the court theatre of his Imperial Majesty the Mikado of Japan', again brought the Orient into public attention. From this point on, orientalism and exoticism in America achieved sensational popularity. Those who had been dazzled by the Rue de Caire at the Paris Exposition of 1889 would find it surpassed by the 1893 Chicago version of a Cairo street complete with Algerian, Tunisian and Turkish villages, Moorish Mosques and Egyptian temples, as well as the wriggings of 'Little Egypt', an exotic dancer regularly featured as part of this well-known exhibit.

The "daring" or "exotic" dance became "a staple ingredient in the shows of the nineties; Little Egypt's dance at the

Columbian Exhibition of 1893 elicited dozens of Fatimas, Cleos, Zazas and Fifis."¹⁹ Theatrical directors such as Augustin Daly and Alfred Thompson (teachers of Isadora Duncan and Loie Fuller) employed Nautch girls in their plays. And even Carmencita Dauset, a well-known Spanish vaudeville dancer, was to include in her repertoire a spectacular and extremely popular "Danse du Ventre" which she presented to American audiences in 1890.²⁰

Of the three American dancers Ruth St. Denis was the one most completely preoccupied with Far Eastern culture. In Radha, from the moment the curtain rises, when the incense is burning before the image of Radha on the throne or altar, the atmosphere of Orientalism pervades the scene. The offering of flowers, the beating of the gong, the chanting of the high priest before the idol of Radha are all presented as acts of Eastern worship. Slowly as the spirit enters the idol, Radha rises, steps down and the sacred dance begins in a series of five circles demarking the dominion of the five senses. Beaded amulets, garlands, bells and a small bowl are used as symbols of the sense to be pictured in movement. Finally, in a spinning Delirium of the Senses, Radha renounces the sensual appetite and returns to the altar.

Ruth St. Denis in this highly theatrical dance attempts to explore her vision of Far Eastern lands steeped in mysticism and exoticism. The sacred dance of the Nautch girls is combined with the impersonation of the deified Radha whose spirit, according

to Indian mythology, would on occasion enter into the idol, step down from the dais, and edify the elect with a dance. St. Denis frequently used the structure of actual oriental dances as a basis for her creations. Cobras, Nautch and Incense, choreographed 1904-1906, are direct examples of her Western interpretation of classical eastern dances.

The lighting, drama and decor of Radha were, according to critics of the day, Belascoesque in construction.²¹ St. Denis, who spent five years working for theatre playwright and director David Belasco in melodramatic productions such as Zaza and Madame Dubarry, was particularly inspired by his realistic approach to set design. In Radha she had conceived an elaborate Eastern temple setting, complete with Hindu worshippers. There were "flower-wreathed coconuts, twinkling little lamps on the shrine, and even the caste marks sacred to the Brahman priests who meditate[d] before the small brass idols on the low table."²² Her desire for detail did not overlook the colouring of her body to a dusky bronze with a rosy hue staining the tips of her fingers and soles of her feet, her eyes darkened with circles of soorma drawn around the inner edge.²³

Yet St. Denis' stage design, although detailed, did not incorporate the specificity of realism which drove David Belasco to duplicate exactly the point lace coverlet of Mme. Dubarry's bed studded with brilliants and bordered with sable. According to Lincoln Kirstein, hers was a personal re-creation inspired by

"the Athenaeum, and public library, cigarette cards and travel photographs."²⁴ Her employment of rather common motifs such as the gong, the incense, the shrine surrounded by Oriental censers, screens and bric-a-brac illustrates that her knowledge in this area evolved out of popular sources.

Ruth St. Denis claimed that popular events such as Little Egypt at the Chicago Exposition, a pageant ballet called Egypt through the Centuries and a public exhibition of an East Indian village at Coney Island were her early inspirational sources. Of the Coney Island hippodrome St. Denis declares:

Here for the first time I saw snake charmers and holy men and Nautch dancers, and something of the fascination of India caught hold of me.

When I reached home that evening I had determined to create one or two Nautch dances, in imitation of those whirling skirted damsels, and possibly a faint echo of Mme. Sadi Yaco[sic].²⁵

The recent invention of electrical lighting, a relatively inexpensive medium that could be manipulated to create and quickly change the stage atmosphere, was rapidly incorporated into the repertoire of stagecraft in vaudeville and popular theatre. St. Denis, in her adaptations of Eastern dance to Western stage conventions, employed lights and colour, just as David Belasco had, to heighten the drama of her performances. Loie Fuller, a featured actress in Alfred Thompson's and Felix Vincent's theatrical production, was also influenced by the play of light and color upon the stage. In these productions such scenic transformations were so popular "that during the third

week of the run of one pantomime spectacle, the scenery and changes alone were presented."²⁶

—Panoramas, dioramas, cycloramas and magic lantern shows were almost as popular as stage spectacles during the nineteenth century. Loie Fuller inverted the method of molding light into shapes and forms on a static screen used in the above exhibitions by actually becoming the screen and fragmenting the light with her flowing, silken draperies.

With a small band of electricians, Fuller continued to explore techniques such as indirect cross beams and luminous salts as well as variations of direct lighting. A later example of her evolving creativity was seen in Fire Dance where she evoked a fantastical image of smoke and flames by dancing on a pane of glass lighted from beneath.

Two final theatrical devices of the popular theatre which influenced the works of Fuller, Duncan and St. Denis were statue-posing and pantomime. The former technique is related to the famous 'statuary' or 'living tableaux' "imported from the continent and inspired in part by the controversy stirred up in 1843 by the public exhibition of Hiram Powers' nude statue, The Greek Slave.

Enterprising theatre managers recognized the possibility of putting similar living statues on the stage, so Palmo's New York Opera House presented a series of biblical tableaux...Within a year at least seven theatres in the city were showing tableaux, with others presented in taverns, hotels and saloons. The exhibitions favoured themes from Greek mythology,

biblical history or famous paintings such as "Venus Rising from the Sea". Lydia Thompson's British Blondes made a spectacular debut in United States, 1869, with statuary display of "lower limbs" in the short togas they wore to play classical male roles."²⁷

Loie Fuller, in an early stage appearance of Serpentine reportedly "ended each reappearance with a different pose, and at last whirling sank upon the stage."²⁸ In Radha and Iphigenia in Aulis, St. Denis and Duncan use posturing as a recurrent motif through the dance, frequently returning to a pre-stated pose. Hortense Kooluris, for example, begins Air Gai of Iphigenia in Aulis with a profile Tanagra posture which is repeated three more times before the end of the dance.

Isadora Duncan, albeit in a much more sophisticated form than her vaudevillean predecessors, also incorporated the timely themes of Greece and famous paintings into her danceworks.

"The dance of Isadora Duncan, who finds inspiration for some of her dances in fifteenth century Italian paintings, reveals itself as a mimic art. In the Angel Playing the Viol, she reproduces the arm movements of the bow. In the Primavera, a choreographic copy of Botticelli's painting, she simulates the act of sowing flowers with her open hand."²⁹

Duncan also uses this mimetic device throughout Iphigenia in Aulis, a dance based on the characterization of Agamemnon's daughter. Air Gai, the first and third sections, evokes the joyous dance of the Thessalian maiden, Iphigenia, with graceful skips, swing steps and runs. In contrast, the austerity of her sacrifice in Air Lento is achieved through slow walking, gliding and swaying of the body. Both Air Gai and Air Lento incorporate

mime into the dance; the former in the act of strewing flowers over the stage and audience, the latter in the ritualistic raising of an offering to the gods.

The employment of gestures or postures to convey information was an ever-popular technique used in the theatre, as well as in the more classical pantomimic acts featured in almost every variety show of the time. Working with directors Augustin Daly and David Belasco, Duncan and St. Denis must have undoubtedly come into contact with mime and gesture as well as Francois Delsarte's naturalistic theories of human expression. One of Isadora's earliest acting experiences included a pantomimic character in Miss Pygmalion. A Dance of Mirth, choreographed at an earlier date than Iphigenia, demonstrates a very literal incorporation of mime into dance. "At one point in the dance she actually grabbed at the sides of the body in a direct response to the Milton line which says, 'And laughter holding both its sides'."³⁰

Following the decline of ballet in Western Europe, dance truly became a product of the popular theatres and music halls. In America, where ballet had never really established itself, dance was popularized by performers such as Carmencita, the Spanish dancer; Pat Rooney, the song-and-dance man; Lottie Collins, the high-kicker; Kate Vaughan and Letty Lind, the skirt dancers and Little Egypt, the famous Nautch dancer.

Although Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis developed their dance styles to a more sophisticated level than their vaudevillean counter-parts, the early "bit parts" they performed in variety shows and theatrical productions inevitably affected their works. These influences showed themselves in the alluring costumes and short yet arresting performances which characterized their work as well as in their continued use of the peddle and waltz movements from the famous skirt dance and the statuary posturings from living tableaux.

Fuller, Duncan and St. Denis eventually moved away from the concept of dance as divertissement in a variety show or play and established programs consisting of several short dance pieces. Their later choreography obviously underwent many changes. Certain elements remained the same, however, including Fuller's interest in light and spectacle as well as St. Denis' and Duncan's persistence with the themes of Eastern exoticism and Greek idealism. As we have already seen, such themes and devices had their direct origins in the tradition of vaudeville and popular theatre which flourished throughout the major urban centres of late nineteenth century America.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Physical Culture Movement and Applied Aesthetics of Delsarte in America

The Physical Culture Movement in general, and more specifically the promulgation of Delsarte's philosophy of dramatic expression, provided a moral rationale which was necessary before dance as an art form could begin to flourish in America. Chautauqua, an institution which promoted the popularization of literature, the arts, music and drama, was noted as well for its emphasis on health and physical culture.

In America at this time there was a widespread puritanical ^{禁欲} view of art, a view which tended to see creative endeavours as somewhat superfluous activities that had no place in society of physical energy and hard work. Chautauqua, in the guise of educational enlightenment, brought an ^{聖氣} aura of respectability to theatre and dance. Originally it began by offering lectures and dramatic readings, expanded to include excerpts from operas and Shakespearean plays and culminated in the presentation of entire plays with up to a dozen actors. This gradual infusion of theatrical arts, along with Delsarte's systematized theories of expression, provided an intellectual, scientific and moral justification for the moving body. In particular, Genevieve Stebbins, a Delsartian teacher and performer who presented dance

with "an air of impeccable good breeding," appealed to those Americans who still connected theatre, and especially vaudeville, with painted women and dissolute men. In an 1892 address to the National Association of Elocutionists, Stebbins defends statue-posing as an art, differentiating the Delsartian method of statuary from vaudevillean tableaux:

At a certain stage of this work comes in statue-posing. Here let me quickly add that I do not mean tableaux with wigs and whitewash.

The statue-posing that I refer to is educational, leading on to pantomime and gesture.¹

This new school of Applied Aesthetics attained a wide sphere of influence from 1880-1900 when a great deal of Delsartian-based literature was added to the already popular market of books on spiritual and physical health. These included, to mention only a few, Steel McKaye's Grammar of Pantomime, Genevieve Stebbin's Delsarte's System of Dramatic Expression and a book entitled Harmonic Gymnastics and Pantomimic Expression which Olga Maynard declares was "basic to the education of young ladies of the time."²

The influence of Delsarte is probably the single most important factor in the early development of American modern dance. Its effect can be seen not only in the content, but also in the form and structure of the early Duncan and St. Denis

dances. As St. Denis stoutly maintained in a 1906 interview "Delsarte, the much ridiculed, is, in spite of all the silliness and stupidity that has been committed in its name, the best foundation of all truly expressive dancing."³

The European Delsartian vogue infected America in the late nineteenth century. However, the history of Delsartism in America and its effect on modern dance is an especially difficult and oblique path to trace from its place of European origin. Ted Shawn, in his book Every Little Movement, reports that "...from the start the Delsarte craze swept America and held absolute sway for the next twenty years."

Just as in present day America comic strip characters have given rise to the manufacturing and sale of such articles as Hop-a-long Cassidy costumes for children and space helmets, etc., in the 1890's one finds in magazines advertisements for "Delsarte corsets", "Delsarte comestics", "Delsarte gowns" and one manufacturer even advertised a "Delsarte wooden leg."⁴

Unbeknownst to Delsarte, who developed his aesthetic theories for European singers and actors, two young American dancers had begun to apply his principles of dramatic expression to their own art form. As children both Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis experienced aspects of the American interpretation of Delsarte's methods. St. Denis, in her autobiography, discusses her early lessons in the technique of Delsarte.

The boarders who were a desperate necessity to the budget used to call me "Delsarte", because of the lessons that mother gave me from time to time. In New Haven, not long before, she had met a Madame Pote, who was a seventh attenuation of a pupil of Francois

Delsarte. Her technique was dubious but her enthusiasm contagious. I vaguely remember a little book with some sketches in it of extremely chaste ladies and gentlemen standing straight and nude in poses of Delsarte relaxation and posture.⁵

Mme. Aurilla Colcord Pote who kept a studio in Carnegie Hall, offered lessons in reading, dramatic art, vocal and physical culture. With her particular attention to the alleviation of nervous disorder she must have appealed to the neurasthenic Mrs. Dennis. Ruth also recalls standing at the foot of the the brass bedstead "with Mother sitting in her gingham apron holding this book and directing my movements. I grasped the rail of the bed, swinging my long legs to and fro, doing the numberless exercises that were the actual beginning of all my dancing."⁶ Later, in works such as Radha's Dance of Smell, the low-leg swing would be used repeatedly. This movement, which Ted Shawn describes as "fundamental to Delsarte",⁷ is even more noticeable in Duncan's Air Gai of Iphigenia in Aulis, a dance composed almost entirely of low-leg skips and swingsteps.

Isadora Duncan's early experiences with Delsarte's technique are not so easily traced. In order to envision the connection of Duncan's dance style to Delsarte's theories it is necessary to look at the original Delsarte theory as well as the Americanization of that theory.

Through a scientific study of human expression in everyday life, Delsarte originally evolved a theory whereby actors could dispense with stock, pantomimic gestures and project inner

feelings with more honesty and accuracy. He explored, analysed and "classified the connection between the physical areas of the body and the expressive implications of their design and mechanics." For example, he divided the body into three principal areas: the head corresponded with the intellect; the torso with the spirit; and the limbs with action. In this way the appropriate body area could be readily used to elicit the desired outer expression. From about 1859 he taught his "laws of expression" to a variety of students including theatrical artists, painters, sculptors, musicians, lawyers, statesmen and clergymen. His work is formally known as the Science of Applied Aesthetics and some of his pupils were William MacReady, the great Hamlet of Booth's day and Jenny Lind, the Swedish nightengale who won the heart of America in the mid-nineteenth century.

Delsarte died in 1871 without arranging his lifeworks for publication. As a result, there evolved many different interpretations of Delsarte's humanistic manner of expression. Steele McKaye, an ardent disciple, returned to America and excited public attention through interviews, lectures and theatrical productions based on the Delsartian Theory of Dramatic Art. In the area of creative movement, Genevieve Stebbins was the principal figure involved in the Americanization of Delsarte's theories into what became known as Harmonic Gymnastics. According to Joseph E. Marks III, in his

historical study of dance education in America before 1900, Stebbins once stated that,

Delsarte aesthetic gymnastics were purely an American idea. It was the uninformed instructors who had little or no idea of the philosophy of Delsarte that caused it to become known as the "doctrine of limpness." The system was based on exercises that stressed relaxation. It also stressed the use of statue-posing and tableaux-making that purported to show the various emotions. It was the recitation or the singing of a song.⁹

Stebbin's "Harmonic Gymnastics" developed through a combination of Swedish gymnastics and a physical application of Delsarte's aesthetic:

The Swedish system is based on the same premise of the value of slow motion and held attitude as giving time for nutritive changes in cellular tissue. An exclusive use of the Swedish system is detrimental to expression, but combined with the aesthetic it proves valuable.¹⁰

It is interesting to note that later both Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis were to incorporate gymnastic exercises into their forms of dance instruction; Duncan, like Stebbins, professing that "Both should go together, for without gymnastics, without the healthy and methodical development of the body, the real dance is unattainable."¹¹

Genevieve Stebbins, who preceded Isadora Duncan by almost a decade often wore only a white Greek tunic while presenting her dances and lectures based on the theories of Francois Delsarte. Her early works (1880's) consisted primarily of dramatic readings and statue impersonations such as Diana Discovering Endymion, Augustus Cupid with Bow, Apollo Belvedere, Venus

Dressing her Hair, Dying Gladiator and others. By November 25, 1892, when Ruth St. Denis viewed a matinee performance including Niobe statue-poses, Myth of Isis, and The Dance of Day, Stebbins had evolved her technique to the inclusion of pantomime and gesture. Ruth especially recalls the dignity given to the human body "moving in the Grecian atmosphere of grace and light."¹²

To me at this early age nothing so beautiful had ever entered my life. The curtain rose on a dark greenish background (this was, of course, long before Isadora's famous blue curtains) and there stood an exquisite woman in a costume made of soft ivory white-material that fell in gracious lines to her feet...

She moves in a series of plastiques which were based upon her understanding of the laws of motion discovered by Delsarte. Her poses were derived from Greek statuary and encompassed everything from the tragedy of Niobe to the joyousness of Terpsichore.¹³

Although it is not known if Isadora Duncan ever saw Genevieve Stebbins, her main predecessor in the revival of Greek dance, there is some evidence that Duncan, like Stebbins, was aware of the teachings of Delsarte. Gordon Craig, a longtime friend and lover of Isadora, affirmed this point in a BBC interview:

But I [do] believe that that forgotten man, Del Sarte, [sic] helped her through his book. Once I found a copy of this book in her room when I was looking for a trunkful of books I had lent her. I did not find the trunkful, so I took this one. Many thousands of people in America and France studied this book by Del Sarte, and yet very few of these thousands ever gleaned any secrets from its pages. A word or two to a genius like Isadora is always enough...¹⁴

The posing and elocutionary methods of Delsarte are further exemplified in one of Duncan's first dance pieces. Dancing to

Longfellow's poem I Shot an Arrow she incorporated a Delsartian teaching recitation which had been taught to generations of American children. In Isadora Duncan's scrapbook, an undated article Great Life-Rhythms Pulse Through Body tells of a young Californian girl "gawky and self-willed, morose and lyric by turns" dancing to her brothers orations.

"I shot an arrow into the air, It fell to earth, I knew not where
Unconsciously, she began to move, to gesticulate, to run, to dance."¹⁵

Later, Duncan went on to choreograph relatively more sophisticated works to poems such as The Rubaiyat, Il Penseroso and L'Allegro. According to Allan Ross MacDougall, Duncan was quoted in an article printed in the Director Magazine as saying,

Delsarte, the master of all principles of flexibility, and lightness of body, should receive universal thanks for the bonds he has removed from our constrained members. His teachings, faithfully given combined with the usual instruction necessary to learning dance, will give a result exceptionally graceful and charming.¹⁶

Certain Delsartian movement principles remained visible in the lifework of Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis. These influences extended beyond the usually acknowledged employment of Americanized Delsarte posturing techniques to include even more detailed principles, as denoted in Appendix I, concerning the use of torso, gesture, successional movements, spirals, hip swings, tension and relaxation.

Delsarte's theory involving the torso as the stronghold of the spirit became intensified in early modern dance when Duncan

and St. Denis proclaimed the torso as the center of all movement. Isadora, in My Life, relates how she,

spent long days and nights in the studio seeking that dance which might be the divine expression of the human spirit through the medium of the body's movement. For hours I would stand quite still, my two hands folded between my breasts, covering the solar plexus....I was seeking and finally discovered the central spring of all movement, the crater of motor power, the unity from which all diversities of movements are born...¹⁷

Duncan's declaration of the solar plexus as a source of movement reiterates the already established Delsartian views related to the centre of the body.

The torso represents the moral element or love of being. It is the weight and centre of the being. It is the core so to speak, of the man.¹⁸

As a result, contrary to ballet which focused on the movement possibilities of the dancers' limbs, the torso movements of the modern dancer became of prime importance. In Air Gai of Iphigenia in Aulis, Hortense Kooluris alternately overcurves her back and arches her chest adding exuberance to the previously stated upright skipping combination. Ruth St. Denis, in The Dance of Scound, sinks into posture III balancing on one leg, her torso remarkably curved (like a large "C"), her centre of gravity very low.

Genevieve Stebbins wrote in Delsarte's System of Dramatic Expression, "the zones of the torso are points of departure or arrival for a gesture."¹⁹ The use of succession, in which the movement begins in the torso and ripples outwards through the

desired part of the body was originally a technique taught by Stebbins, particularly in her Serpentine Arms exercises. Later, both Duncan and St. Denis used successional arm movements, a technique frequently described as a source of fascination to audiences who hitherto had seen the arm moved as single unit in the well known balletic style. St. Denis' rippling arms, a leitmotif of early dances such as Incense and Cobras, as well as the culmination of Delirium of the Senses often caused a great deal of excitement.

I knew that my arm ripple was the subject of much interest and speculation on the part of the public. In the Incense my arms were held out from the shoulders and were raised and lowered with a subtle rippling movement which began between the shoulder blades and seemed to extend through and beyond the fingers.²⁰

Duncan's successional arm movements were much larger than St. Denis', and thus tended to exhibit an unfolding rather than rippling action. These unfolding arms held uplifted to the sky, hands hanging limply from the wrists, became a trademark of Duncanesque dance. Yet, this gesture so indicative of Duncan's style was by 1893 already a typical movement taught as an exercise in popular, inexpensive Delsarte pocketbooks including Grecian Picture Dance or Dream of Ancient Greece.

Exercise I:

Raise the right arm (with the hand inclined downward) as high as the shoulder carrying it, well outward as it goes up, the arm slightly curved, the fingers the second and third a little nearer to the palm than the third and the fourth.

Hold the hand steady letting wrist move downward until the hand is extended upward, then in this position,

lower to the side.²¹

This is the arm gesture we see as Hortense Kooluris skips across the stage in Air Gai; she lifts her arms, hands hanging limply from the wrist as she skips, overcurving her back, then unfolds her arms downward as her chest arches upward.

In order to further attain the dynamics of movement and flow, Duncan and St. Denis not only employed successional motion, but also the Americanized principles of tension and relaxation based on Delsarte's laws of reaction and recoil. The Delsartian teaching poem I Shot an Arrow, mentioned earlier, indicates the interaction of these two oppositional yet interacting dynamics; the gesture involved in drawing back the bowstring enacts a moment of tension before the ensuing release. Although Duncan and St. Denis never completely eliminated static posturing from their dances, the contrasting dynamics of tension and relaxation added a quality of inflowing and outflowing energy to the transitional phrases between poses. In addition, with this acquired sense of relaxation in movement, they, unlike ballet dancers, used the forces of gravity and weight to explore the dimensions of kneeling, sitting and even lying on the floor.²²

With the acceptance of Delsarte's theory of the torso as the "core" of man, Genevieve Stebbins developed a series of exercises which concentrated on the use of gravity and change of weight. She categorized these aesthetic gymnastic drills as:

Exercise I - Back Fall; Exercise II - Front Fall; Exercise III - Kneeling; Exercise IV - Bowing; Exercise V - Sitting; Exercise VI - Rising from Sitting; Exercise VII - Rising from Backfall; etc. In considering these exercises one cannot help but recall the sensuous sitting and lying positions which initiate Radha's Delirium of the Senses or her final climatic backwards fall. Upon rising to return to the throne, St. Denis deftly raises her torso with the aid of her arm and swings into a kneeling position in the manner demonstrated in Stebbin's Exercise VII. Although it cannot be determined whether the young Ruth St. Denis ever read Genevieve Stebbin's drill books, it is nevertheless intriguing to specify the striking similarities in movement which indicate possible patterns of influence.

The Spiral Sway drill, in Stebbin's Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics, instructed the reader to produce a semi-circular rhythmic dance motion through shifts of weight on the balls of the feet. This may have been the source of the basic movement in St. Denis' Incense, as well as the spiral spinning in Radha's Delirium of the Senses. An even closer resemblance between Stebbins and St. Denis reveals itself in the fact that Stebbin's theories of spiral movement were derived from the shifting weight movements of Oriental dance. In 1893, when Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics was published, the author-dancer had taken a new philosophical approach, moving away from neo-classicism towards mysticism. In pointing out

sources for Stebbin's change of outlook Suzanne Shelton suggests that it probably had something to do with late nineteenth century popular trends, a theory she supports with the following statement from an 1897 review of Stebbin's book: "This is just the kind of book to interest fashionable people who are attracted by the Buddhistic philosophy."²³

Two of Stebbin's dances, Myth of Isis and The Dance of Day,* had a profound effect on St. Denis one November day in 1892. In her autobiography written years later she remembered, in vivid detail, the graceful movements of the dancer.

... she did a dance called The Dance of Day. At the opening of the floor asleep, and then, awakened by the morning sun, she rose with a lovely childlike movement to her knees and bathed herself in the rays. A light rhythmic step signified the morning and the noontide; and then began the slower movements of the afternoon, presently mingled with sadness as the late rays brought her slowly to her knees and again into her reclining posture of sleep.²⁴

The themes of Egyptian life that Denis had witnessed in Stebbin's Myth of Isis, as well as the diurnal-nocturnal cycles outlined above, are re-echoed in St. Denis' Egypta (1910), a theatrical tale of the rise and fall of Egypt during the period of a day and a night. The third section of Egypta, The Dance of Day opens with a figure asleep on the floor, an obvious reflection of Stebbin's earlier dance. In a taped interview, Ruth St. Denis explained that Stebbins had inspired her use of

* Ruth St. Denis called Genevieve's solo The Dance of Day. It is not known if this is the actual title.

draperies and helped bring about that "combination of spirituality and spectacle" which became the basis of her career.²⁵

An element of obvious importance in these early modern dances was a style of gesture that illustrated a closer link to the theories of Delsarte than to the techniques of ballet. Balletic gesture in the nineteenth century had evolved to the state of set, external signals, recognized and accepted by both performer and audience. Duncan and St. Denis appear to have developed their gestural styles based on the American interpretation of Delsarte's naturalistic form of expression, having already come into contact with such forms through their involvement with vaudeville and the popular theatre of Augustin Daly and David Belasco.

Quoting Delsarte, Stebbins writes, that gesture should always "be taken straight from nature,"²⁶ and later adds her own comments in this regard: "Follow the psychology of Nature. All else is mechanical, false."²⁷ Duncan declared that the oceans and the mountains taught her to dance, while St. Denis claimed inspiration from trees in a storm, the motion of clouds in a sunset or the quivering crouch and final spring of a tiger.²⁸ It is more probable however that their movement source originally hailed from Delsarte's naturalistic theories of expression. The New Applied Aesthetics recognized a "physiological correspondence to the psychic faculty which, if unobstructed

...carried outward into pantomime".²⁹ Duncan always cautioned students to begin any gesture from an inner desire, and to be strongly conscious of the impulse before moving, no matter how small or gentle the gesture.³⁰ In this context we can begin to understand a comment by Hugo Von Hoffmannstahl who, when asked what he meant by "true" movement, replied that "the movements of these women (Duncan and St. Denis) when they dance are true; the movements of the Europeans are false."³¹

Like Delsarte, these early modern dancers desired to unite and project inner thoughts and emotions with outer movements. They believed that "dance was capable of creating more than a momentary diversion in the attention of the audience and was in fact capable of moving people deeply and seriously."³² Yet, unlike Delsarte, they did not approach movement from an analytical process of exploration, observation and classification.

Exploration was surely a function of the early dances of Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis. Their choreographic and teaching skills however, lacked the basic analytical framework that Delsarte was able to bring to the theatre. This fact, along with the financial necessity to serve the entertainment requirements of the commercial North American theatres kept the early works of the modern dance pioneers bound to vaudeville theatrics and, as we shall see to popular and commercial trends in fashions and the arts.

CHAPTER FIVE

Popular and Commercial Imagery

In America, particularly New York, the early modern dancers came into contact with European artistic trends through commercial vehicles such as men's and ladies' fashions, advertisements, posters, interior decorating and architectural design. Ancient Greece and the Far East were recurrent popular themes not only in the theatre but also as visual images in the surrounding cityscape. Fashion industries of the nineteenth century popularized the Grecian bend and the loose-fitting gown, as well as exotic accessories such as oriental fans, peacock feathers and parasols.

It was an era of eclecticism, a trend particularly noticeable in architecture and interior decorating. The Neo-classical and Gothic styles established after the Civil War were rivalled, but not surpassed, by the Oriental craze initiated in part by the Centennial Exposition of 1876. Subsequently, the most fashionable mansions had Moorish, Turkish or Chinese rooms decorated with teakwood and Indian brass tables, Oriental carpets, wrought iron wall hangings and other exotica. The popular Tiffany touch with its adopted decorative style from Art Nouveau displayed light and coloured glass in naturalistic themes that included meandering streams and

fantastic cloud formations, the outlines of flower petals and the veining of leaves. Even the park fountain, in New York's Union Square, with its newly acquired pond lilies and lotus flowers, was evidence of this growing exotic trend.

For the most part, the early American modern dance choreographers did not have a direct awareness of their inspirational sources. In their autobiographies they seldom recall the original ideas, movements or forces that caused them to choreograph a particular dance. As a result it is difficult to trace the inspirational sources especially of their earliest dances. However, the striking similarity between the content of early American posters and advertisements and the content of early American modern dance illustrates an important link which generally passes unnoticed.

The European poster mania hit America in the 1890's. Recent technological developments in lithography had expanded the field of visual arts to include the general public. Posters, advertisements, book illustrations and art reproductions became widely distributed in Western Europe and in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century reached America. As a result, the latest English and Parisian fashions, as well as the popular lithographic styles including Art Nouveau were brought to the

American people.

The designs of Eugene Grasset, a European artist who in 1889 became very influential in the developing poster industry in America, aptly illustrate the popular thematic trends in this new form of commercial art. His sources of inspiration, like other European poster artists, generally arose from:

"the art of the Middle Ages, of Persia and Egypt, Japanese woodcuts, Botticelli and the English Pre-Raphaelites. His stained glass windows, tapestries, wall papers and posters show a predilection for two-dimensional design, strong contours and muted colors. His posters for Harper's were modern yet not so avant-garde or foreign as to offend the educated but conservative readers who formed its clientele."¹

Other European graphic artists such as Charles Ricketts, Aubrey Beardsley, Carlos Schwabe, Alphonse Mucha were also keenly aware of the French Symbolist climate of the time and incorporated many of the favourite Symbolist themes into their works. Will H. Bradley, Louis J. Rhead and John Sloan represent a few of the early American poster artists who in turn were greatly influenced by their European kinsmen and further distributed the varied graphic styles and themes to the American public.

The artistic poster craze played an important role in the development of commercial lithography and advertising. In this brazen age of advertising unhampered by legislation, advertisements "ranging from handbills to sheets of gigantic proportion dominated the scene in cities and towns, and even in rural areas there was no escape from them".² In the face of

over-production and under-consumption, the quality and quantity of advertising expanded in the 1890's. Formerly uninspired commercial bills were replaced with eye-catching visual imagery, often imitative in both style and content of the aforementioned European poster artists. In addition, Greek Revivalism maintained its popularity in middle America, even though the artistic credo of the day, as published in Le Petit Journal de Refusee presented "Classicism, prostrate on the ground, trampled upon by a Beardsley female, a Japanese actor and an Indian woman (apparently symbolizing the young American art) while two other figures represent Death and the Devil."³

The arising bicycle industry was particularly attuned to the new graphic trends, with advertisements for Orient, Apollo, Columbia or Victor Cycles. Such advertisements sported the flat, compositional values of Japanese design and frequently featured the graphic style of Art Nouveau. Exotic women in Eastern garb were used to promote the sales of various cigarettes and medicinal tonics, while the Grecian woman draped in a loose-fitting tunic, who appeared as early as 1820, was still a good seller in 1890. Still other advertisements such as Borax Soap and small magazine flyers capitalized on famous European paintings such as The Birth of Venus, La Primavera, Iphigenia and Salome.

The use of line and content in the 'style moderne' which infected poster art in America are of particular interest in

relation to the dances of Loie Fuller and Ruth St. Denis.

The most conspicuous and recognizable characteristic of the art nouveau style in France as in other countries was the use it made of long, flowing, interlacing linear patterns. It came to France at a time when the line was already triumphant, when the graphic arts in Paris had reached a very high level of accomplishment and the linear qualities of Japanese art and pictorial composition were influencing many of the new painters such as Gauguin and Toulouse-Lautrec. This use of lines in art nouveau had been inspired by a study of natural shapes, particularly of plants. Theories and books on the subject of "natural movement" in line and form were encouraged in a number of progressive art schools...*

Loie Fuller's earliest dances explored the moving sculptural possibilities of light reflected on continually flowing lines of drapery. Her titles, The Butterfly, The Violet and The Rainbow, illustrate her fascination with popular naturalistic themes. In Serpentine the hem of her undulating skirt formed simple pictorial images which were interpreted by audiences as giant lilies, orchids, winged moths and golden chalices. In a dance entitled The Flower, Fuller further explored the naturalistic inspiration of 'le style moderne' appearing completely clothed in garlands of intertwining flowers. St. Denis was to reiterate this theme in Radha's Dance of Smell.

The influence of Japanese art and the interest in the Far East emerged as well in the commercial graphics of American companies such as Whiting Paper, Victor Bicycles and Overman Wheel, Barlock Typewriter, Inland Printer, etc. Images of exoticism and hellenism in the graphic forms of Isis, Salome, Apollo and Iphigenia, became well established in the field of

advertising. It was, in fact, from a common cigarette poster of Egyptian Dieties that St. Denis claimed to have received the inspiration which changed her career from actress to dancer.

This sealed image of Isis, a superficial commercial drawing for a cigarette company, opened up to me in that moment the whole story that was Egypt.

Here was an external image which stirred into instant consciousness all that latent capacity for wonder, that still and meditative lore of beauty which lay at the centre of my spirit.⁵

Drawing from popular representations of the occult, the exotic and the sensuous, from images of the femme fatale and the lotus blossom, St. Denis created Radha, Egypta and Incense. In Radha she assumes the ideal image of the femme fatale and through movement denotes symbols such as the lotus, the Buddhist square and the five interlinking circles of the senses.

It is a symbolic dance, employing such properties as flowers, wine etc., all the senses being exprest [sic] through the medium of waving hands and woven paces.⁶

Isadora Duncan's early dances reflect the still prevalent popular American interest in Greek classicism. From 1820 on, decades after the European interest in classicism, America sought new cultural direction from the ancient worlds of Greece and Rome.

The emergence of the professional architect, coming at a time of change in popular taste, was ideally fitted to hasten the development of a new and characteristic style. ...that the Classic Revival forms were not new set categories imposing a new slavery of design, but rather a powerful means of breaking off the shackles of the past--became a controlling factor in the American Classic Revival.⁷

After 1830 the Greek Revival reigned supreme on this side of the ocean; thus the architects commissioned to design splendid buildings for the new capital city of Washington turned to Greek models for their inspiration. From Washington, this obsession with Greek forms swept Philadelphia and New York, storming through smaller cities on its way.

Victor Seroff, in The Real Isadora, writes of "a general American interest (and version of) an ancient culture, resulting at that time in many a popular lecture series from many a highbrow podium in which Americans tended to congratulate themselves as direct heirs of Athenian democracy and its attendant arts. Slides and illustrations of the Acropolis were popular in many homes, though what was known of the real ancient Greece was rather limited."⁸ The Duncan family illustrated an early interest in hellenism, especially Isadora's father who fashioned the safety deposit vault in his bank after the Greek style and also wrote poetry celebrating the antique shores:

INTAGLIO: Lines on a Beautiful Antique

See the centuried mist is breaking!
Lo, the free Hellenic shore!
Marathon - Plataea tells
Greece is living Greece once more.⁹

Fleeting postures and ritualized offerings reminiscent of figures on a hellenic frieze reappear throughout Duncan's Iphigenia in Aulis. Such a dance is an obvious reflection of an American view which idealized the forms of Greek and Roman art

and architecture. Duncan's loose-fitting Grecian style of dress, at times more revealing than the usual uncorseted figure, was not an entirely new fashion. The struggle to retain or discard corsets in women's dress was a popular subject of this time. Dress styles, especially in lounge-wear, had already begun to alter from the angular bustle and the fancy gathered folds of the Watteau toilette to softer and simpler lines.

As early as 1860 European artistic designers offered the loose-fitting Pre-Raphaelite and Greek gowns as aesthetic alternatives to the corseted figure. In the 1890's Aubrey Beardsley and Henry van der Velde, among other exponents of Art Nouveau, became increasingly interested in dress modes and presented in their graphic works the modified Greek style of high waisted dresses. This uncorseted figure quickly became the vogue of modern commercial art, both in America and Europe. Stella Newton, in her book Health, Art and Reason, reiterates Walter Crane's comments concerning the new designs in women's dress:

I think that there can be no doubt...of the influence in our time of what is commonly known as the Pre-Raphaelitic school...Under the new impulse, the inspiration from the mid-century from the purer and simpler lines, forms and colours of early medieval art, the dress of women in our own time may be seen to have been transformed for a while...¹⁰

From what we know of Loie Fuller's magnificent, flowing costumes it is easy to see how the works of this dancer were affected by changing styles in dress and the images of the femme fatale in

the posters and advertisements of Art Nouveau. The eastern exoticism of Ruth St. Denis was also based on popular and commercial trends in the field of lithography. Her inclination to dress in the costumes of ancient Egypt arose from an imaginative encounter with an image of Isis displayed in an ad for Turkish cigarettes.

At the turn of the century American innovations in advertising, fashion, posters and architecture transformed European and classical models of artistic expression and created an abundance of themes and popular images which contributed greatly to the appearance of a new choreographic style. As the elite artists of Europe and America were seeking a modern style dissociated from the borrowed eclecticism of ancient Greece and Rome or Far Eastern lands, the early modern dancers were actually using these well established trends as thematic material for their dances.

Plate 1: Loie Fuller

Plate 2: J.C. Leyendecker, The Century, 1896

THE CENTURY



J.C. Leyendecker, *The Century*, 1896.
(from: *The Golden Age of the American
Poster*)

Upper right: Loie Fuller.
(from: *The Complete Guide to
Modern Dance*)

Plate 3: Louis Rhead, The Century, 1896

Plate 4: J.C. Leyendecker, The Interior, 1898

Plate 5: Loie Fuller, Serpentine



Louis Rhead, The Century, 1896.
(from: The Golden Age of the American Poster)



J.C. Leyendecker, The Interior, 1898. (from: The Golden Age of the American Poster)



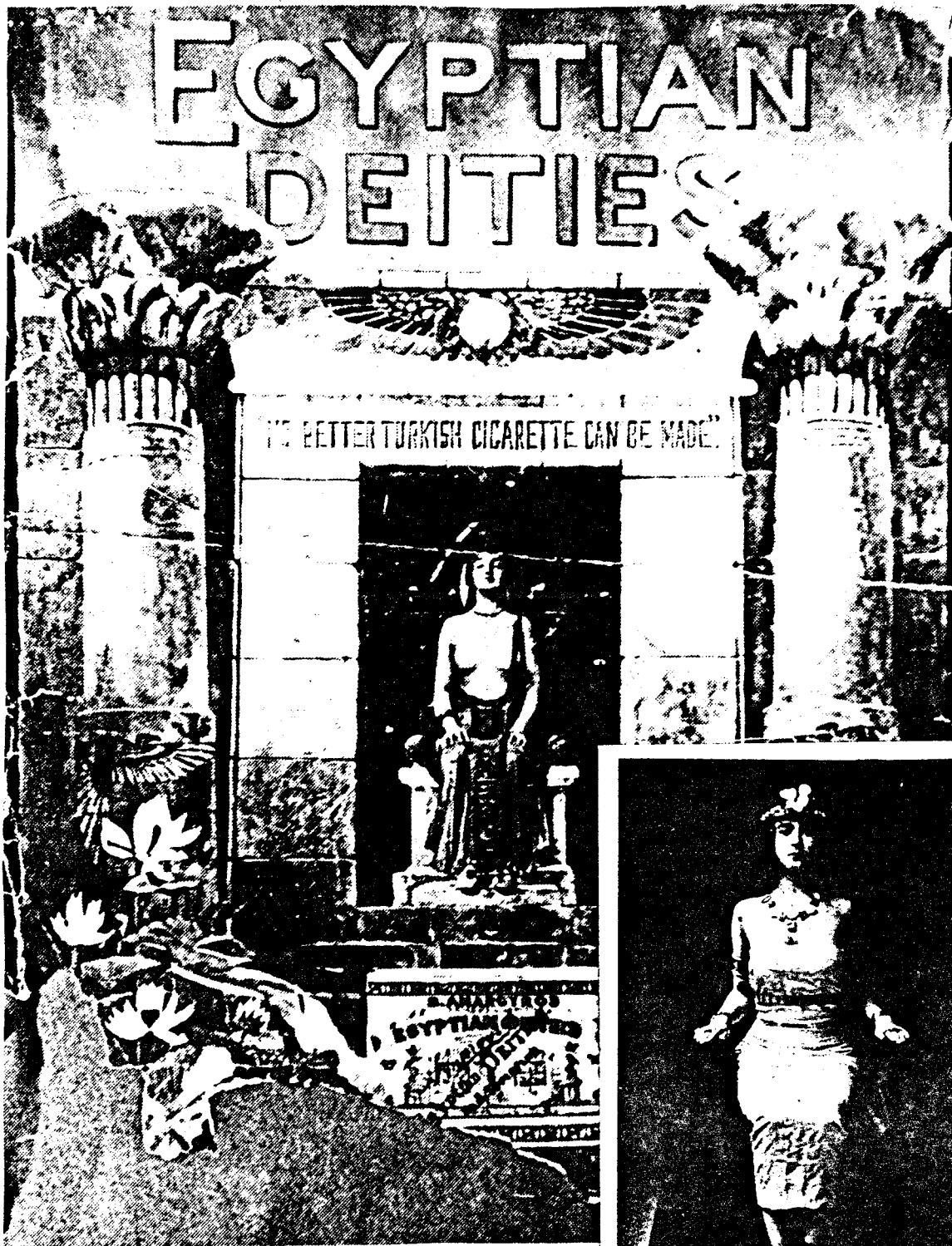
Loie Fuller, Serpentine. (from: Chronicles of the American Dance)

Plate 6: The Cigarette Poster Which Inspired

Ruth St. Denis' Career as a Dancer

Plate 7: Ruth St. Denis. A Costume Inspired

By The Cigarette Poster



The cigarette poster which inspired Ruth St. Denis' career as a dancer.
(from: Miss Ruth)



Ruth St. Denis. A costume (never actually used in performance) inspired by the poster. (from: Miss Ruth)

Plate 8: Ruth St. Denis, Radha, 1906

Plate 9: Unknown, 1899

Plate 10: J.C. Leyendecker, The Inland

Printer, 1897

Plate 11: Ruth St. Denis, Radha, 1906



Ruth St. Denis, Radha, 1906.
(from: The Dance in America)

DR. D. JAYNE'S
TONIC VERMIFUGE
A SURE REMEDY FOR WORMS. THE BEST TONIC FOR YOUNG-OLD.

The Cure for C... s. Colds, Asthma, or any Lung or Throat Disease, is DR. D. JAYNE'S
EXPECTORANT.

Unknown, 1899.
(from: The American Poster)



J.C. Leyendecker, The Inland Printer, 1897. (from: American Poster Renaissance)

Price Twenty Cents



Ruth St. Denis, Radha, 1906. (from: Miss Ruth)

Plate 12: Will Low, Scribner's, 1895

Plate 13: Isadora Duncan, New York City, 1898

SCRIBNER'S



Will Low, Scribner's, 1895.
(from: The Golden Age of the American
Poster)



Isadora Duncan, New York
City, 1898. (from: A Short
History of Classical
Theatrical Dancing)

Plate 14: Theatre Advertisement,

San Francisco, 1882

Plate 15: Isadora Duncan

Plate 16: Unknown, 187?

Plate 17: United States Lottery

Advertisement, 1820

VICTORELLIS

—AND MISS—
Annie Braddon!
TEUTONIC TROUBLES

LUCK AND PLUCK



LUCK AND PLUCK

PRETTY SCHOOL MARM

Oscar Barron Al Edward Baker John A. Baker J. D. Best John F. Blinn Mattie C. Cline Harry T. Cline Charles F. Cline Louis Cline J. M. Cline F. M. Cline Frank Cline Thomas Cline William Cline John Cline Harry Cline Charles Cline Louis Cline J. M. Cline F. M. Cline Frank Cline Thomas Cline William Cline John Cline Harry Cline Charles Cline Louis Cline	OWEN DALE ANNIE BRADDON MAX BRIDGES BOB W. INDALE DARRIEL VINTON GEORGE WALLACE HARRY OSWIFT GEORGE BERKWOOD G. KISSETT GEORGE KIDD J. F. STARE JOSEY LEWIS DOLLY DUTTON EM. BLACKMORE WYBARRA FANG MARY VICTORELLI MORRIS MARBLE
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Isadora Duncan. (from: The Art of the Dance)

Theatre Advertisement, San Francisco, 1882. (from: The History and Development of Advertising)



GRAND NATIONAL LOTTERY
FINISHES drawing about the 15th of next month. The wheel is now very rich, only 3500 tickets to be drawn, and nearly one hundred and Twenty-five thousand dollars floating.
Whole Tickets \$ 50 | Quarters \$12 50
Halves 25 | Eighths 6 25
Sixteenths \$5 12 1-2.

New Jersey Navigation Lottery.
Has only 10 days drawing more, and many reasonable prizes yet to be drawn.
Whole Tickets \$17 00 | Quarters \$4 25
Halves 8 50 | Eighths 2 12 1/2

Grand State Lottery,
Commences drawing 20th March next.
Whole Tickets \$11 00 | Quarters 2 75
Halves 6 50 | Eighths 1 37
Tickets in any of the above Lotteries may be had at

GILLESPIE'S
No. 11. South Third Street.

SMITH BROTHERS
PURE BORAX
FOR SALE EVERYWHERE

Unknown, 1872. (from: The American Poster)

United States Lottery Advertisement, 1820. (from: The History and Development of Advertising)

CHAPTER SIX

Epilogue

In their search for acceptance as serious artists of the dance Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis eventually left the entertainment tradition of American popular theatre and made the transatlantic migration to Europe. Fuller achieved almost instantaneous success upon her arrival in Paris. Duncan and St. Denis came in 1900 and 1906 respectively, and established their reputations in London, Berlin, Paris and throughout Europe.

Even before Fuller's arrival in Paris, her success was already being ensured by Mallarme and other Symbolist artists who had begun to praise dance as the purest theatrical art form, as the perfect melding of visual and musical elements. Mallarme, in his theories of art, considered the theatre as the common man's right to the vision of the ideal.

Dancing realizes the imaginary, offers to the poet his Vision, and reveals to him the nudity of his concepts. Dancing alone can attain this purity; dancing alone can translate the fleeting and the sudden right to the very Idea, our glimpses of which are of the same nature as the dance; unexpected and transitory, fading just as we attempt to seize them. Dancing, the paradise of all spirituality, is symbolic of our highest aspirations, it is the ensemble of forms through which the human body expresses the visual incorporation of the Idea and points out, higher than the painted ceiling of the theatre, some star.¹

Fascinated by the ephemeral nature of dance, Mallarme sought to

free the stage from the traditional decor which he believed only fettered the imagination. Thus, when Loie Fuller performed in Paris, animating and carving the decor through her play of lights and swirling draperies, Mallarme proclaimed La Loie the "ideal spectacle."

The stage shunned by leaps or hard to the points, acquires the virginity of a spot undreamed of, that the figure isolates, and will reconstruct and adorn. The enchantress creates her environment, draws it out of herself and gathers it in again in a silence of quivering crepe de Chine.²

In elaborate language that continually exalts the ideal, European critics such as Mallarme and Valery have forever glamourized Loie Fuller as a metaphor of the nineties. The emblematic nature of her movement was often the focus of these critics' reviews. "The dancer is not a woman," remarked Mallarme, "... but a metaphor summarizing one of the elementary aspects of our form, blade, cup, flower, etc...."³ Loie Fuller's dancing figure, which at times completely disappeared into the swathes of waving draperies, fulfilled Mallarme's concept of a depersonalized theatrical art in which "nothing interposed between the idea and the spectator."⁴

To retain such high critical acclaim it was not necessary for Fuller to abandon the world of music hall entertainment. Following her initial failure to secure an engagement at the Paris Opera House, she danced primarily at the Folies-Bergere and finally in her own theatre. Her performance at these popular

theatres was readily accepted by an aesthetic which viewed "the circus, the vaudeville, the bal, [as] serious pleasures; the primitive, the ugly, the exotic were in demand."⁵

Coming at a time when the subject of colour and its relation to sound and mood was a prevalent interest, Fuller's spectacle of light was received with great fascination. Theatrical experiments in the relationships between sound, colour and the sense of smell were already being carried on at this time by a small group of artists known as the Synesthesiasts. Painters and writers were also aware of the affinities between sight and sound, as exemplified in Whistler's musical titles for paintings such as Nocturne and Symphony, and in Rimbaud's sonnet Les Voyelles which works out a system of correspondences between colours and vowels.

Among the crowds that flocked to see Fuller's performances were artists such as Rodin, France, Beaudelaire, Riviere, Dumas and Roche. Rodin and France lauded her reawakening of the dance of antiquity, proclaiming her "an airy figure comparable in grace to those dancers whom one sees on Pompeian wall paintings,"⁶ a "Tanagran figure in action."⁷ Frequently noted for both her hellenic and oriental persuasions, Fuller prefigured the later arrival of Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis with their dances reminiscent of ancient Greece and the Orient.

Part of the appeal of these two dancers was a result of early American roots which had fostered the elements of expansiveness and optimism, primitiveness and simplicity. Duncan and St. Denis had arrived in Europe at a time when dance, like music, was receiving a great deal of prestige for its natural, primitive and non-discursive qualities. Duncan, with her classical dance of elemental movements--running, walking, skipping, standing, lying, etc.--expressed a pure simplicity of form. St. Denis displayed a pagan innocence with her infusion of spirituality and puritanism into the street dances of the Nautch or Danse de Ventre. Thus, the sculptor Jose Clara praised Duncan's dancing as a revelation of "Certainty, Simplicity, Grandeur and Harmony,"⁸ while in the dance of Ruth St. Denis, Hugo von Hoffmanstahl rejoiced over the "combination of a strangely alive being with primeval tradition."⁹ The English author Havelock Ellis proclaimed dance as "the loftiest, the most moving, the most beautiful of the arts, because it is no mere translation of abstraction from life, it is life itself."¹⁰

In responding so positively to the American dancers, critics in Europe were reacting to themes which, while initiated in Europe, had been somehow infused with a new form and vitality. Their appreciation of the "Certainty" and "Simplicity" of these dances were recognitions that European themes had been translated into a unique American idiom. It has been the purpose of this essay to show that the roots of this American idiom

extend into a tradition of popular culture. The reviews of such intelligent critics as Stephene Mallarme and Paul Valery, while serving as a tremendous catalyst for the appreciation of modernism in dance, do not always present an accurate depiction of these early dance forms. While full of rhapsodic acclaim for Fuller's spirituality as an embodiment of the 'Idea' they completely disregard her frequent use of popular tunes and her recurrent reliance on the simple peddle step for locomotion.

Fuller, Duncan and St. Denis attempted, with varying success, to separate themselves from the entertainment world of vaudeville and music halls. Perhaps it was their acceptance among European artistic circles that led each of these dancers in their autobiographical writings to overlook their formative years in America. Duncan, for instance, almost completely disregarding the particulars of her early stage development claims, in My Life, that Nietzsche, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Whitman and a visit to ancient Greece were the cornerstones of her dance. Similarly Loie Fuller leads one astray in a fanciful account of her "accidental discovery" of the Serpentine dance, never taking the time to mention its direct connection to the skirt dance of the day.

An examination of the views of dance historians concerning these dancers does little to clarify these oversights. If we are to believe these historians we need to be satisfied that Duncan's "first dancing masters were wind and wave,"¹¹ "Walt

Whitman and the American reaches of lands, mountains and rivers."¹² According to Walter Terry, Loie Fuller "stumbled upon a way of dancing"¹³ while Ruth St. Denis "with nothing to copy, with hardly a clue revealed a new world of dance."¹⁴ These statements are most often reiterations from the dancers' autobiographies which, as we have seen, reveal only partial truths. For example, how many times in reading about these early dancers does one come across the assertion that 'Nature' was a constant source of influence and their guiding inspiration. Such an assertion, while conveying a general sense of the emotional attitudes of these dancers, needs to include a recognition that many of the sources for their naturalistic expression were derived from the theories of Delsarte. Their use of natural images developed, in part, from Delsartian teachers such as Genevieve Stebbins, who used it as an implement for teaching this Americanized method of naturalistic gesture.

[All three dancers, in their praise of natural movement, are known to have spoken against the stiff, unnatural posturing of ballet. It is unclear however the degree to which their dance styles were a conscious rejection of the ballet form. For although toe dancing existed in American popular theatre, it could hardly be described as a dominant dance form at this time. In their formative years, ballet was simply not a part of the experiential background of either Fuller, Duncan or St. Denis. Fuller never studied ballet, while Duncan and St. Denis are said

to have taken only one or two classes--hardly a sufficient basis from which to devise a rebellious dance form.

It is not necessary to view the emergence of modernism in dance entirely in terms of a reaction against traditional balletic forms. Nor should it be said that Fuller, Duncan and St. Denis were innovators whose inspirations came only from nature or a well-spring within themselves. We can modify both these views through an understanding of the relationship between the choreographic breakthroughs of these dancers and the cultural milieu in which these dance forms first appeared. And it is this understanding which establishes Fuller, Duncan and St. Denis as American dancers whose major early influences came from the vaudeville stage and popular theatre, the physical culture movement, the applied aesthetics of Delsarte and the neo-classical and exotic imagery in commercial art.

From such popular sources arose a number of core elements which began to define the notion of dance in the twentieth century. Fuller, Duncan and St. Denis moved towards a simplicity of composition in which movement began to emerge as the primary focus of dance. Until the beginning of the twentieth century Western theatrical dance was an elaborate combination of dance, theatre, music and decor. Dance co-existed with these other arts, and furthermore often depended upon them for the presentation of the spectacle as an integrated whole. Isadora Duncan, however, presented her dances in stage settings which

afforded a minimum amount of decor. A small, rectangular carpet or blue curtains were usually her only props. Loie Fuller abandoned the use of theatrical gestures in dance and motivated her movement from the effect of light on flowing draperies. Storyline was often discarded in the short choreographed works of all of the early modern dancers. The reduction of elements such as storyline, decor and theatrical gesture opened the door for increased emphasis on the element of movement. In this way the pioneers contributed to the beginnings of a movement towards the pure medium of dance which was realized half a century later in the works choreographed by Merce Cunningham.

Influenced by Harmonic Gymnastics, America's popular version of Delsartian aesthetics, these dancers established the torso as the inner source from which gestures were motivated. Their successional and spiral movements were the beginnings of a centering in the torso which was later developed in the contraction and release technique of Martha Graham and the fall and recovery of Doris Humphrey.

The dances of the early pioneers were further characterized by a sense of inner exploration and discovery, a natural outgrowth of popularized theories of Delsarte which had systematically connected inner thoughts and emotions to outer movements. Isadora Duncan proclaimed the dancer as one whose body was "a luminous manifestation of his soul...speaking in movement out of himself and out of something greater than all

selves."¹⁵ Ruth St. Denis described dance as an "inescapable necessity to manifest in outward form that state of consciousness which has attained a certain intensity of illumination."¹⁶ Such explorations of the inner world of man and its relationship to the outer world were thematic inspirations in the later works of Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey, two proteges of Ruth St. Denis.

To Loie Fuller, famed for her symbolic representations of natural objects, the line of the body became less and less important. The play of light on moving material with its fragile, living centre at times altogether disappearing, became the essence of her dance. The depersonalization of the dancing figure was a unique and important component of modernism upon which Alwin Nikolais later based his multi-media theatre of dance and light.

With their wide range of image, theme and movement forms, Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis brought about a re-examination of the boundaries defining dance. Their assimilation of popular culture trends opened up possibilities in the medium of dance which had never before been considered, and created an ambience which encouraged further evolution of the art form. This expanded sense of the possibilities of dance, in fact, became one of the hallmarks of modernism with many choreographers seeking to create unique and diversified movement styles. From the roots of popular culture arose, ironically

enough, a modernism in dance which, because of its continual search for choreographic breakthroughs, has led many observers to view it as an elitist and, in many respects, an esoteric art.

Appendix I:

Appendix I
Dance Analyses of
Serpentine,
Iphigenia in Aulis
and Radha

Serpentine (1891)

choreographed by: Loie Fuller

danced by: Loie Fuller

music by: Gillet, "Loin du Bal"

First performed at Casino Theater, New York.

COLUMN A

Verbal Description

1) Serpentine begins on a darkened stage. Loie Fuller is visible only as an indistinct form draped in flowing folds of cloth. Lifting her arms, which are attached to the skirt hem, she unfolds the vast, shimmering material.*

2) As Loie manipulates her arms, simultaneously (in, out & up), the cloth begins to undulate carving swooping arabesque lines in space. At the same time, using a small peddling foot-step Loie advances (upstage) and retreats (downstage) 3 times.

3) Her central figure motionless now, Loie Fuller alternates each arm sending the material in higher, enveloping cascades. The curvilinear arcs descend and sweep out in a horizontal pattern; folds of cloth crossing inward simultaneously before the outward swing.

4) Then, peddling in a half turn, her arms held out horizontally and the draperies rippling with a circular

5) wrist-action, Loie Fuller arches into a backbend, until her head & upper torso are completely visible.

6) Rising & turning, the draperies flowing upward through a brief repetition of the moving imagery, in which

COLUMN B

DANCE ANALYSIS OF:

Movement

COLUMN C

Image

-flow of long skirt is primary movement interest
-wooden rods extend movement of material

-carving of curvilinear, arabesque lines in space
-peddle step

-curvilinear lines in space

-golden chalice or drinking cup

-peddle step (1/2 turn)

-backwards arch
-waltz movement

-opening flower or lily

-peddle step (full turn)

COLUMN A	COLUMN B	COLUMN C
Verbal Description	DANCE ANALYSIS OF: Movement	Image

Mallarme envisioned a chalice & fire, Loie suddenly swings the skirt hem out into a large circle turns that undulates up & down as she peddle-turns seven times round.

7) A slow lateral arm lift creates the fleeting image of a winged creature, that vanishes with the quick reiteration of the fire & drinking goblet motifs.	-body main-tains low centre of gravity (even as draperies grow higher)	-winged moth or butterfly fly
--	--	-------------------------------

8) The seething drapery continues to grow vertically, crossing and completely swaddling the central figure ...	-central figure completely disappears in draperies	-chalice -fire -cocoon
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9) until in a "spectacular finale of colour, the voluminous, iridescent skirt collapses."	-total release	
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* The black and white film, of course does not illustrate the lighting spectacle so important to Serpentine. Beaudelaire, the French symbolist poet, in a review recreates the flow of light and colour. "Suddenly a stream of light issued apparently from the woman herself, while around her the folds of gauze rose and fell in phosphorescent waves, which seemed to have assumed one known not how, a subtle materiality taking on the form of a golden drinking cup, a magnificent lily, or a glistening moth wandering in obscurity. But all the time, between the many shapes assumed by the drapery one divined the tremulous figure of a woman."

Iphigenia in Aulis (1905)

choreography by: Isadora Duncan

danced by: Hortense Kooluris

music by: Christoph Willibald Gluck

First performed at the Krystall-Palast, Berlin, Germany.

COLUMN A

Verbal Description

COLUMN B

DANCE ANALYSIS OF:
Movement

COLUMN C

Image

I) AIR GAI

1) Hortense Kooluris, clad only in a filmy, knee-length tunic stands stage right, relaxed, yet still in a profile, Tanagran posture. Gracefully she swings into a skip step, step--backwing step, step combination which travels horizontally across to stage left.* Arms generally held out lightly, sideways at shoulder height, she occasionally lifts them overhead with an upraised face.

-posture

-Greek frieze
-bas relief

2) A brief waltz-twirl step as described in Lesson No. 10, Exercise 1 of Irma Duncan's book The Technique of Isadora Duncan--"take two steps to the right, starting with the right foot. On the third step raise yourself on the toes of the right foot, while the left leg is raised backward from the hip as high as possible."**

-waltz step
-similarity to peddle step mentioned in Serpentine and Radha

3) Hortense returns to stage right with a skip & a swingstep along the same horizontal pathway. Then alternating her profile swing position to squarely face the audience, she again repeats the skip, swingstep, skip--adding a half turn, her torso alternately overcurved, then up-lifted. She lifts her arms, hands hanging limply from the wrist as she overcurves her back, then unfolds her arms as she arches her chest upward. Again, she repeats the waltz step.

-skips and steps
-use of torso

-successional arm movement
-waltz step

COLUMN A

Verbal Description

4) With small lilted swingsteps, she carves out a curved path as if strewing flowers over the stage. Three skips, a waltz-twirl step and another skip out to the audience pantomiming the tossing of petals over them.

5) Air Gai ends as it began. After 5 small running steps to stage left, Hortense repeats the waltz-twirl step, and a skip, step, step--backswing step, step horizontally to stage right where she resumes her original pose.

* For further explanation of the skipping and backswing steps, see Irma Duncan, The Technique of Isadora Duncan, (New York: pp. 5-8.

** Ibid., p.26.

COLUMN B

DANCE ANALYSIS OF:

Movement

-waltz
step
-panto-
mime

-running
steps
-waltz
step
-posture

COLUMN C

Image

-maiden
strewing
flowers

-Tanagran
posture

COLUMN A

Verbal Description

I) AIR LENTO

1) From this final tanagran pose in Air Gai, Hortense slowly lowers her arms as she turns and begins a slow, stately walk across the stage. Extending her arms out and up as if in offering to an unknown deity, her steps become lighter until she pauses in a final upward reach.

Her arms pull in to the original low offering position and she repeats the extension upwards twice more--across stage right, then diagonally, forward stage right. (Pause)

2) Executing a slow half turn so that her back is to the audience, Hortense drops her arms, circles them and raises the left arm high overhead as she pauses in a deep lunge, face and chest arched upwards. Walking a few steps upstage, still with her back to us, she pauses once more, standing erect and tall, extending her left arm and face upward.

3) Returning to the lowered offering position, section 1, she again repeats the arm extension out and upward twice more as she slowly walks across to stage left, then diagonally, forward stage left. (Pause) Suddenly, pulling away from the upward reach she walks quickly to centre stage and reiterates section 2 of Air Lento, moving upstage, the only variation

COLUMN B

DANCE ANALYSIS OF:

Movement

COLUMN C

Image

-slow
walk

-ceremonial
offering

-arm move-
ment em-
inating
into and
out of
solar
plexus

-low centre
centre
gravity
-simply
standing
in place

-slow
walk

-offering
repeated

-quick
walk

COLUMN A

Verbal Description

being her use of the right arm.

4) Her final movements repeat the offering of section 1, ending once again in the beginning posture.

III AIR GAI

Repeated as in Part I.

COLUMN B

DANCE ANALYSIS OF:

Movement

COLUMN C

Image

-posture

-Tanagran
posture

Radha (1906)

choreographed by: Ruth St. Denis

danced by: Ruth St. Denis

music by: Leo Delibes

First performed at the New York Theatre, New York.

COLUMN A

Verbal Description

"When the curtain went up a vast temple was shown encrusted with gold and dim with smoke."* Radha sits in meditative silence on an altar in centre stage clad in a richly woven halter and shorts, bejewelled with rings, bracelets and necklaces.

The movement begins as two rows of chanting priests file in, bearing garlands, jewels, bells and a bowl. After a stylized greeting, they kneel facing inwards; a demarkation of the ritual space. A drummer and chief priest enter and also kneel, the former at the side, the latter in front of the altar. Offering supplications to Radha, the chief priest completes the initial ceremonial rites.

COLUMN B

DANCE ANALYSIS OF:
Movement

COLUMN C

Image

-Far
eastern
exoticism
-realism
of stage
setting

-femme
fatale
-brief,
alluring
costume

COLUMN A

Verbal Description

I) THE AWAKENING

The idol, awakening, slowly begins to breathe--the chest rising and falling in response. Eyes flutter, and open. Hands unfold, beginning the first of five hand-signs resembling Eastern Indian symbolic gesture. This hand dance forms a motif, which is repeated, with variation, throughout Radha.

1. Hands initiate opening of the arms at chest level
2. Fingers become delicately expressive as the arms and torso move to a new position
3. The right leg unfolds and reaches downward during the third gesture.
4. Hands palms still together lower to chin level as if in prayer.
5. Slowly the hands open under the chin to form a lotus blossom.

Finally the lotus closes and the idol resumes her original position--legs folded, hands and eyes lowered.

Eyes opening once again, legs unfolding, Radha steps forward carving variations of Indian hand gestures in space. Reaching full height, she pauses for a moment (gesture 2) then, in an archaic stylized walk she steps from the altar to greet each priest with a hand sign.

COLUMN B

DANCE ANALYSIS OF:

Movement

COLUMN C

DANCE ANALYSIS OF:

Image

-statue
posing.

-yoga
position

-East
Indian
hand &
arm
gestures

-ceremon-
ial
prayer

-lotus

-pantomimic
greeting

-archaic
stylized
walk

-Egyptian
frieze

COLUMN A

Verbal Description

The Dance of the Senses is composed of four parts exemplifying touch, smell, hearing and taste. Each section begins with a sharp drum beat followed by Ruth's stylized archaic walk to the waiting line of priests. Beaded amulets, garlands, bells and a small bowl inspire the movement in these brief solos.

II The Dance of Touch

Walking forward Ruth arcs one arm overhead and sets the other in opposition; quickly alternates her arms twice and adds a turn in place. This movement motif is repeated several times in The Dance of Touch. With a low lunge stage left, Ruth arches back tossing her head, turns twice and poses.

Walking backwards she displays her jewels with subtle arm and hand rotary movements, leading into two turns and a repetition of the alternating arm motif.

Dance of Touch increases in tempo and reaches a climax with a low leg swing to left and right, two turns hand gestures, two more turns and a final pose.

COLUMN B

DANCE ANALYSIS OF:
Movement

COLUMN C

Image

-fascination
with the
senses

-peddle
step

-back
arch
-posture

-spiral

-low
leg
swing
-hand
gestures
-posture

COLUMN A

Verbal Description

III THE DANCE OF SMELL

The Dance of Smell begins in a decorative pose; two garlands entwined around Ruth's torso. Spacious turns along a horizontal line typify, and in fact commence the movement in this section. Following the first crossing, Ruth softly peddles back along the same line while indulgently smelling the flowers.

Again she whirls into the spacious crossing adding a low leg swing at the end. Removing the garlands from around her neck while turning in place, Ruth walks with several low leg swings and once again spins, the garlands swinging as extensions of arms. The last movement phrase is repeated and ends in a sensuous pose, the garlands framing the goddess' face and falling in a long line across her body.

COLUMN B

DANCE ANALYSIS OF:
Movement

-posture

-peddle
step

-leg
swing

-posture

COLUMN C

Image

-decorative
garlands

COLUMN A

Verbal Description

IV THE DANCE OF SOUND

A series of poses and quick arm gestures set the structure in the Dance of Sound. Small bells fastened to her fingers send tremors through Ruth's body, particularly noticeable in each of the four postures.

Ruth rises and sinks with small vibrations initiated by the bells. Arms continuing movement down, lift over her head into the temple gesture --followed by a single turn, low leg kick into a second pose.

Hand gestures similar to those in "The Awakening" rest in a third posture.

Quick arm changes, 2 curved, 2 angular lead into a peddle step to centre stage where Ruth strikes a final pose.

V THE DANCE OF TASTE
(not filmed)

COLUMN B

DANCE ANALYSIS OF:
Movement

COLUMN C

Image

-series of
4 poses
-gestures
(hand)

-low
center
of grav-
ity, es-
pecially
noticea-
ble in
this
dance of
poses

-posture

-torso,
very
curved
-centre of
gravity
low
-peddling
step

COLUMN A

Verbal Description

VI DELIRIUM OF THE SENSES

Ruth again reiterates variations of her Indian hand signs as a priest fastens bells to her ankles and wraps a gold skirt around her waist. Draping the folds over her shoulders in resemblance of a sari, she slowly sways to the centre of the stage and sinks to the floor in a sensuous sitting position.

Delicate kisses to the hands, caresses along the arm, gestures of sleep and lotus blossoms moving down from the face to outline womanly curves, form the movements of this floor section. After two repetitions, Ruth leans forward, kisses her fingers and rises.

A delirium of the senses begins with small radial turns which alternate clockwise and counter-clockwise increasing in speed until Ruth is spinning continually in one direction. Each turn is initiated with a torso spiral; the arms following in response.

A brief posture (stage left), a moment of balanced equilibrium, and Ruth is spinning across the stage in a horizontal lines, only to return

COLUMN B

DANCE ANALYSIS OF:

Movement

COLUMN C

Image

-arm and hand gestures

East Indian costume and gestures

-swaying of body on balls of the feet

-pantomime

-sensuousness
-femme fatale
-lotus blossom

-peddling step

-nautch dance

-spirals of the upper torso
-centre of gravity low

-posture

-statuary

COLUMN A

Verbal Description

again. A backward arch, head thrown high culminates each spatial crossing.

The radial turning in centre stage resumes, climaxing with the addition of:

- a) arm ripples
- b) holding and lifting the edges of the flowing skirt
- c) undulation of the skirt hem, while spinning.

Finally, with a flourishing lift of her skirt, the circling ends abruptly, and Radha falls backwards to the floor, in a state of delirium.

VII FAREWELL AND RETURN TO THE THRONE

Ruth rises to her knees, arranging her disarrayed skirt. In a series of gestures she:

- a) undoes her skirt and lets it fall about her knees.
- b) raises her arms to the prayer position.
- c) rises, arms opening then retracting into the centre of her torso
- d) repeats the prayer gesture opening to a lotus
- e) and finally reiterates the bowl motif, as she steps out of the skirt and walks backwards.

COLUMN B

DANCE ANALYSIS OF:
Movement

-back
arch

- successional movement of the arms
- use of skirt as extension of body and movement
- back fall
- complete relaxation

COLUMN C

Image

-nautch
dance

COLUMN A

Verbal Description

Stepping up to the altar, Radha offers her bowl-like hands to the priests and audience, sweeping her arms out, then up over her head. As she sits on the altar resuming her original position, the priests and goddess lift the prayer gesture over head and down to torso level.

COLUMN B

DANCE ANALYSIS OF:

Movement

COLUMN C

Image

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