LOIE FULLER AND MODERN MOVEMENT

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Loie Fuller (1862-1928) was a dancer who performed throughout the United States and Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Her dances used light, color, space, and movement in a manner that had not been seen prior to her performances. Considering her inventive achievements in movement, Fuller should have a prominent place in the narrative of modern dance and performance. However, this is not the case. Most of the studies that have been conducted on Fuller’s work categorize her either as a technical contributor to the theatrical fields of costuming and lighting, or as someone who influenced other dancers.

In this thesis, I suggest that Fuller is not merely a forerunner to, but an early practitioner of modern dance. Fuller’s movement is unique because of her marriage of space, body and inner life, spirit and emotion. She combines and uses these three elements in a prescient way that rejects the formal embodiment of classical dance, specifically ballet.

I argue that Fuller was a modern dancer because of the way she employed space, body, and inner life in her movements. In order to examine the way in which she used space, body, and inner life I examine her through three different lenses. First, I use Symbolism as a lens through which to examine how the Symbolists and Fuller used space to represent interior emotion and spirit. Second, I use Rudolf Laban’s theories and techniques regarding the movement of the body as a lens to investigate the bodily movement of Fuller. Third, I use the acting method developed by François Delsarte as a lens to analyze Fuller’s ideas regarding the embodiment of spirit and
emotion in movement. Ultimately, I argue that the fusion of space, body, inner life, color, light, and fabric present in her performances was a coalescence that was uniquely Fuller and ultimately an expression of modern movement.
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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION: CULTURAL CONTEXTS OF LOIE FULLER

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Loie Fuller (1862 - 1928) was a dancer who performed throughout the United States and Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Her dances used light, color, space, and movement in a manner that had not been seen before her performances. Fuller understood the significance of employing these elements in collaboration with each other. In her performances, Fuller swirled billowing costumes and fabric above her head while she danced. Underneath the surging fabric and colored lights her body was engaged in perpetual motion. To sustain her continuous activity and support the motion of her rippling costumes, her movement radiated from the core of her body. In her performances it is evident that Fuller understood the significance of implementing the core muscles to support sustained movement. She also possessed an acute sense of kinesthetic awareness, and an understanding of how bodily position, weight, and velocity affects movement.

Fuller’s use of the torso as her center of movement is significant because it situates her as a modern dancer. Many dance and performance narratives claim that modern dance commenced in the early 1900s, and because of this Fuller is typically considered a forerunner to the movement. Until recently, her dance had not been associated with core movement; instead, it focused on her use of light and costume. However, some recent research including books by Ann Cooper Albright and Rhonda K. Garelick demonstrate the use of the core as the center of Fuller’s movement. These claims situate Fuller as a modern dancer and suggest that manifestations of modern movement were happening earlier than previously thought.
In relation to theatre, Fuller was known for her technical contributions to the field. She developed new techniques in costuming and lighting for use in her performances. In 1894, Fuller patented a garment design where wands were attached to the sleeves of a costume. She held the wands in her hands so that she could extend the fabric of her costume. In terms of lighting techniques, she projected light through a filter in order to reduce glare and she is also credited with the development of under-stage lighting (Albright 59, 61).

Considering her inventive achievements in movement, Fuller should have a prominent place in the narrative of modern dance and performance. However, this is not the case. Most of the studies that have been conducted on Fuller’s work categorize her either as a technical contributor to the theatrical fields of costuming and lighting, or as someone who influenced other dancers. The recent work of Albright and Garelick acknowledges the marginalization of Fuller in previous dance literature, and begins to re-situate Fuller’s work in the narrative of modern dance. However, both authors note that they have only set a foundation and encourage others to continue researching and writing on Fuller. In this thesis I use much of their work as a base to examine Fuller and the movement she exhibited in her dance, but I extend my research to examine Fuller in relation to modern ideas or artists they either only briefly mention or do not discuss. Specifically, I analyze Fuller’s movement in relation to Symbolism, the dance of Rudolf Laban, and the acting technique of François Delsarte. Symbolism, Laban, and Delsarte each in their own way contain an idea or element that is essential to modern movement. Examining distinct components of Fuller’s movement within the context of these three categories establishes her as a full-fledged member of modern dance.
CULTURAL CONTEXTS OF LOIE FULLER

Essential to an investigation of Fuller’s work is a comprehension of historical cultural notions regarding movement, as well as an examination of how these concepts may have affected Fuller. In order to explore Fuller’s situation in a historical context, I will examine the intentions of these new approaches to dance and the manner in which they were a reaction against classical forms of dance, namely ballet. I will then explore Fuller’s place in the historical moment and the unique elements that she contributes to the era. It is my contention that as she embodies these elements that constitute a resistance to previous forms, she embodies modern movement earlier than is typically depicted in the narrative of modern dance.

Regarding fluctuations in approaches to movement during this epoch, Hillel Schwartz in “Torque: The New Kinaesthetic of the Twentieth Century” asserts, “Between 1840 and 1930 the dance world in Europe and the United States had, by seduction and then concussion, suffered a shift in attitudes toward physical movement” (71). Schwartz depicts 1840 as the beginning of a cultural shift in movement because it was the year that Delsarte began giving his movement lectures in Paris (71). I explore Delsarte’s role in this cultural moment more thoroughly in Chapter Four. However, even though Schwartz notes that philosophical changes regarding movement might have began in 1840, he asserts that the actual physical manifestation of those thoughts did not materialize until 1904 (71, 75).

According to Schwartz, the eventual manifestation of these ideas was not catalyzed by a dancer, but an aeronaut. He proclaims that when Wilbur Wright flew his biplane in a full circle for the first time in 1904, he was the “herald of a new kinaesthetic” (Schwartz 75). The twisting of the plane in the air elicited a new form of movement, torsion. Schwartz declares that the
dynamic balance and torsion of the plane broke the metaphorical seal in regard to movement (75). If the heavier-than-air plane could twist in space, then a heavier-than-air body could twist in space (Schwartz 75). While it might be argued that ballet dancers had been moving their heavier-than-air bodies in space, they had not been doing so in a way that involved torsion or torque. Ballet was about moving the limbs of the body, and executing precise technique. The center of gravity for a ballet dancer was the chest, or upper region of the body, not the torso as it was for a modern dancer.

This discovery of torsion, the ability to twist the entire body in space was influential on many dancers of this era. Not only were dancers moving their “heavier-than-air” bodies in space, they were acknowledging the force of gravity in their movements. Most dance up to this point, namely classical ballet, celebrated weightlessness by encouraging dancers to appear as if their movements defied gravity. Schwartz affirms, “Modern dancers insisted on effort, on weight and torque, and they consistently dissented from the balletic ‘delusion that the law of gravitation does not exist for them’” (75). This new form of dance recognized gravity in movement and encouraged the dancer to play with the body’s relationship to gravity. This acceptance of weight, gravity, and heavy movement was a distinct response to the elevated etherealness of ballet. Fuller played with gravity in her movement and used torque in her dances when she swirled the flowing fabric of her costume. However, Fuller predates Schwartz’s notion of the “new kinaesthetic” (Schwartz 75). Fuller began dancing in the 1880s and Schwartz asserts that the physical manifestation of modern movement did not materialize until 1904. Fuller was dissenting from formalized dance and experimenting with elements of modern movement before Wilbur Wright flew his biplane in a full circle. Schwartz claims, “the emerging kinaesthetic of modern
dance . . . [was a] reaction to ballet” (74). In order to gain a better understanding of what the modern dancers including Fuller were revolting against, I will detail a brief history of ballet.

**BRIEF HISTORY OF BALLET**

Schwartz states, “Formal ballet had begun in the late sixteenth century as a courtly demonstration of grand manners, which proceeded from one straight-spined elegant posture to the next through, soon enough, the five standard positions of the feet” (74). Pierre Beauchamps, (1636 - 1705) a member of Louis XIV's court and director of the French Royal Academy of Dance, is credited with the systemization of the movement vocabulary of ballet (Cass 79). He is recognized for the development of the five basic foot and arm positions as well as being the first person to place emphasis on the turnout of the legs (Cass 79). As ballet moved into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Schwartz notes, “professional ballerinas . . . worked for greater elevation . . . greater agility and more expressive visages” (74). The early 1800s marked the rise of the Romantic ballet and the development of the point shoe. In *Dancing Through History*, Joan Cass characterizes the Romantic ballerina as a “dreamy, sentimental image . . . floating as an unattainable figure of pure love, above mere mortal men” (102). In this era, ballet dancers began experimenting with dancing *en pointe*, which evokes the idea of the dancer being weightless and not of this world. The elevated dancing as well as the dreamy, Romantic themes prevalent in most ballets of this time created the idea that dancing was graceful, effortless, and defied gravity. However, what we think of today as classical ballet did not solidify until the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Marius Petipa (1818-1910) was one choreographer who is said to have bridged the gap between Romantic and Classical ballet. Concerning the difference between Romantic and
Classical ballet Cass notes, “Classical works are created according to formal rules, in contrast to the inventive freedom in Romantic works. An emphasis on technical virtuosity, rather than emotional depth, is another characteristic of classical style” (144). In his choreography, Petipa stressed virtuosity, classic style, and mastery of movement (Cass 149, 150). Cass defines Petipa’s classic style, “Body shapes are clear and elegant. Groups are designed in straight lines, circles, squares, and triangles, usually in perfectly symmetrical arrangements. Soloists are always placed in the middle or above the ensemble. The total expressive manner is noble and orderly. Formal beauty is the keynote” (150). The dancers not only move their limbs in a systematized way, but their entire body movement through the space is codified. The dancers execute their individual movements in a precise, technical, and articulate way, and group formations also operate in a similar fashion; all forms of movement are organized and aesthetically pleasing.

Michel Fokine (1880-1942) was another choreographer who had a significant impact on the form of classical ballet. Fokine was the first choreographer of the Ballet Russes and Cass notes that “[he] favored the classic ballet technique, with its straight back and turned-out legs, as the best training for a dancer; and he built his theories and his choreography on solid ballet traditions” (163). The Ballet Russes traveled throughout Europe and the United States, displaying their classical dance to a wide variety of audiences (Cass 171).

While ballet for the most part has adhered to systematized styles of movement throughout the years, it would be remiss not to mention some of the figures within the ballet world who challenged that movement in some way. Fokine, Vaslav Nijinsky, and Leonide Massine are just a few of the choreographers who challenged and introduced innovative movements to the movement vocabulary of ballet. While Fokine did adhere to classical ballet form, he also
attempted to incorporate inventive movements in his work. Cass notes that he incorporated into ballet, “undulating torso movements in Scheherezade (1904), and . . . turned-in gestures in Petrouchka (1904)” (224). Both the movement of the torso and the use of turned-in as opposed to turned-out movement were cutting-edge for ballet. Other contributors to different forms of balletic movement included Nijinsky who used spasmodic, twisted gestures in the Rite of Spring (1913) and Massine who employed acrobatic moves in Parade (1917). However, what separates these choreographers from the modern dancers is that they were still working within the rigid framework and aesthetics of weightlessness in ballet. Regarding these ballet choreographers Cass states, “these artists took for granted the basic technical training built on fixed positions of the legs and arms that had developed continuously since Beauchamps set and described them in the time of Louis XIV” (224). Fokine, Nijinsky, and Massine were experimenting with movement, but they built their innovations on the foundation of ballet.

MODERN DANCE

As I mentioned earlier, modern movement and dance defined itself in opposition to classical ballet. Modern dance rebelled against ballet in several ways, but for the purposes of my argument, I am going to focus on three specific ways modern dance defined itself from classical ballet. Modern dance reacted against ballet’s bodily style and rigid technique, its lack of attention on inner motivation, and on its emphasis on professional training in order to perform.

First, modern dancers were rebelling against the systematized, technical movement of ballet which insisted on executing methodical dance, giving the body the appearance of weightlessness. Mary Wigman in “The Philosophy of Modern Dance” describes the aesthetics of ballet thusly:
“The ballet-dancer developed an ideal of agility and lightness. He sought to conquer and annihilate gravitation. He banned the dark, the heavy, the earthbound, not only because it conflicted with his ideal of supple, airy, graceful technique, but because it also conflicted with his pretty aesthetic principles” (153).

According to Cass, this reaction against the rigidity and technique of ballet resulted in an “exploration of the middle body, the torso, to start waves of movement; the use of the bare foot; the free swinging motion of the whole body; the treatment of space as three-dimensional; and the importance given to the expression of feelings and ideas” (225). Modern movers did not strive to make their movements appear effortless or weightless; their movement was grounded and weighty. Their center of gravity was lower than a ballet dancer’s; they moved from their torsos as opposed to the chest or head. Their dances were not composed of repetitive movement of the limbs but of unrestricted movement of the whole body.

Second, modern dancers were reacting to the emphasis on exterior form in ballet. Ballet was composed of codified movements that were pieced together to form the dance. Modern dancers, alternatively, thought that movement should grow out of an inner impulse or desire; it should not merely be the combination of dance steps. While ballet dancers may depict emotion in their dance, the dance is not created from an emotion or desire, but by a combination of preordained movements. Modern dancers believed that dance was not merely an aesthetic expression of the exterior, but a manifestation of an inner impulse. Modern dancer Doris Humphrey designated this concept “moving from the inside out” (Cohen 122). In Dance as a Theatre Art, Selma Jeanne Cohen unpacks Humphrey’s statement by remarking that modern dancers began not with traditional steps as ballet did, but with an emotional idea (122). They
then used that inner concept as an inspiration to create physical movement. Cohen goes on to assert that modern dance is concerned “with the body and its natural impulse to express its feelings in movement” (122). The concept of the inner life, meaning emotion, spirit, desire, or impulse was not the same for every modern dancer; every dancer had their own interpretation of this idea. Regarding the inner emotions Wigman states, “Shock, ecstasy, joy, melancholy, grief, gayety, the dance can express all of these emotions through movement. But the expression without the inner experience in the dance is valueless” (152). Accordingly, dance should not merely be physical movement; it should be an outward manifestation of an inner desire. Wigman declares for the modern dancer, “It is absolutely necessary . . . that the dancer portray the dance in a way that will convey the meaning and force of the inner experiences which have inspired him to conceive this dance” (152).

Third, modern dancers were dissenting from the idea that in order to be a professional dancer, you had to dedicate your life to rigorous training in one form of dance. While many modern dancers did have dance schools where they taught their own techniques, they did not believe that the only people who could dance were the people who dedicated their whole life to dance training. They saw ballet as a high-art form in which only the trained elite could be permitted to participate. Modern dancers did not think that trained professionals were they only people who could participate in movement. Concerning this concept Wigman declares, “There is something alive in every individual which makes him capable of giving an outward manifestation . . . to his feelings, or rather, to that which inwardly stirs him . . . It is possible for every human to experience the dance as an expression in his own body, and in his own way” (150). Modern movement is not for the selected few, but for everyone who feels the
internal desire to move their body. It is for the common man, not just for those who can afford lifelong training, as had been the expectation of professional ballet dancers. Wigman discusses how dance should not only be for professionals, rather, “The . . . desire for artistic liberation, for exaltation, for personal ecstasy, for bodily movement, in short, for activating his own imagination is also present in the non-professional dancer, and therefore gives him the right to seek for himself the intense expression of the dance” (150). This new era of movers claimed for themselves the ability to move and dance in space. They pronounced that they could express their emotions and spirit or inner life, through their movement.

Modern dancers not only rejected the classical form of ballet, but they also embraced the idea of individuality (Cass 225). Every modern dancer created their own means of expression and taught their technique to their personal students or followers. Therefore, modern dance did not become a codified system as ballet did. There are numerous techniques, theories, and ideas about movement that fall under the auspices of modern dance. Cass declares, “Modern dance cannot be approached as one revolution with common goals. Rather, it was the contribution of self-willed, dynamic dancers, possessed by strong inner drives and visions” (225).

FULLER AND MODERN DANCE

Loie Fuller fulfills all three of these criteria that categorize Modern dance. She rebelled against formal dance, she believed that movement emerged from a concept of inner life, and she pursued dancing even though she was not a trained dancer. Fuller was an individual who created a unique form of dance though her combination of light, color, fabric, and innovative movement.

What I suggest in this thesis is that in the narrative of modern dance, Fuller is not merely a forerunner to, but an early practitioner of modern dance. Fuller’s movement is a harbinger of
the modern because of her marriage of space, body and inner life. She combines these three elements in a way that rejects the formal embodiment of classical dance, specifically ballet, and she uses them in a prescient way. As I noted, modern dancers such as Wigman and Humphrey would later speak to these elements as being essential to modern movement. In this thesis I will explore the ways in which Fuller used space, body, and inner life in her dance.

Fuller was historically and culturally situated in a moment were attitudes regarding movement were shifting not only in dance, but also in theatre. Before Fuller became known in Paris for her dancing, she was an actress in America. She was not trained in classical dance; rather, she trained as an actress and burlesque performer. Her performances reflected this amalgamation of movement and theatre in the way that she used intricate technical elements and in her awareness of how her body moved in a stage space. Because of this fusion of theatre and dance in her work, I will examine Fuller’s movement in relation to both dance and theatre.

Fundamental to the understanding of how she employed space, body, and inner life in her work is a comprehension of the cultural and artistic shifts occurring in France in the late 1880s and early 1900s.

However, a comprehensive analysis of Fuller’s use of space, body, and inner life in relation to modern dance and theatre set amongst the shifting attitudes regarding culture and art in turn of the century France is an inquiry beyond the scope of this document. Therefore, I limit my discussion to an examination of Fuller’s use of space, body, and inner life in relation to three specific elements that are representative of the historical artistic moment in dance and theatre. Thus, I will explore Fuller’s movement in relation to the artistic moment of Symbolism, modern dancer Rudolf Laban, and theatrical practitioner François Delsarte.
In order to fully explore how Fuller used space, body, and inner life in her performances I connect each of these concepts to Symbolism, Laban, or Delsarte. I use Symbolism as a way to explore Fuller’s use of space, Laban as a way to examine the physical movement of her body, and Delsarte as a way to analyze her ideas regarding inner spirit and emotion. I use these three avenues of inquiry as a means by which to view how Fuller’s theories and techniques of movement may have been influenced by other ideas that were circulating in the cultural milieu. Finally, I argue that the fusion of space, body, internal life, color, light, and fabric present in her performances was a coalescence that was uniquely hers and ultimately an expression of modern movement.

In Chapter Two I use Symbolism as a lens through which to examine how the Symbolists and Fuller used space to represent inner life in terms of emotion and spirit. Both the Symbolists and Fuller used light, space, and visual images in their performances as a means to exhibit an internal feeling or impulse. They both sought to find a way to represent something that was internal and invisible in a theatrical space.

In Chapter Three I use Laban’s theories and techniques regarding the movement of the body as a lens to investigate the bodily movement of Fuller. While Fuller slightly predates Laban, both dancers use their torsos as their center of movement. The movement of the torso is a vital element in modern dance and Laban develops a vocabulary that enables dancers to talk about this movement. This is significant because Fuller did not have this vocabulary; she was not able to document her movement technique in words. In her bodily movement Fuller points to something that Laban would eventually give dancers the ability to talk about. Studying Fuller in
connection with Laban is crucial because it is Laban’s vocabulary that enables us to discuss how the core and the kinesphere are present in Fuller’s movement.

In Chapter Four I use the acting method developed by Delsarte as a lens to analyze Fuller’s ideas regarding the embodiment of inner life in movement. Both Fuller and Delsarte believed that physical movement was an outward expression of an internal essence. They also thought that the internal desire should be able to be communicated through the external movement. Therefore, bodily motion was not purely the superficial movement of limbs and appendages; instead it was something that evolved from the inner spirit and emotion of a person.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

In *Traces of Light: Absence and Presence in the Work of Loïe Fuller*, Ann Cooper Albright explores the development of Fuller’s trademark Serpentine Dance and examines the way in which Fuller employs light, fabric, color, and movement in her performances. She traces Fuller’s work from burlesque and vaudeville performances in America to her rise as a celebrated dancer at the Folies Bergère. She examines Fuller’s dancing within the context of the rise of celebrity culture, and artistic and cultural shifts that were occurring in turn-of-the-century Paris. Albright discusses Fuller’s bodily movement at length and remounts Fuller’s dances herself so that she may better understand them. What Albright discovers in remounting Fuller’s work is that Fuller had to use the torsion and torque of her torso in order to lift her wands of fabric and keep them suspended in the air during her performances. Because Fuller employed her torso in her dance, Albright asserts that Fuller should be considered a modern dancer. In this book Albright reexamines Fuller’s role in modern dance and performance. Albright declares that Fuller was not merely a precursor to the modern dance movement, and that ultimately Fuller deserves to be
recognized for her inventive movements right alongside other modern dancers. Thus, Albright’s assertions greatly inform my own work here not only because she provides substantive support, but also because her work compels my own exploration.

In “Torque: The New Kinaesthetic of the Twentieth Century” Schwartz explores multiple cultural aspects of life in the twentieth century to see how they were influenced by movement. Schwartz states,

Over the next century, between 1840 and 1940, children and adults would slowly be rehearsed into a habit of gesturing and a repertoire of “streamlined” gestures central to the new kinaesthetic -- clean, fluid, curvilinear gestures moving from the center of the body outward through uninterrupted by musically well-controlled rhythmic impulses. (91)

This epoch witnessed the commencement of a new form of motion, a movement that radiated from the center of the body. This movement was not only manifested in dancers, but also in children and adults. Schwartz attributes this new movement to the development and demonstration of powered flight. He claims, “at the turn of the century, with the advent of powered flight, dancers . . . became enamored of torsion” (Schwartz 75). He points to Wilbur Wright’s flight in a full circle as the metaphorical and cultural moment that elicited torsion (Schwartz 75). Schwartz designates this new form of movement which emerges from the center of the body the “new kinaesthetic” (Schwartz 75). Schwartz’s ideas support my own considerations of how movement was changing during Fuller’s development and performative heyday.
In *Electric Salome: Loie Fuller’s Performance of Modernism*, Rhonda K. Garelick endeavors to place Loie Fuller in a fully developed, critical dialogue with dance and drama (16). Garelick’s research explores Fuller not only as a precursor to modern dance and theatre, but also as a critical participant and contributor. To acquire a deeper understanding of Fuller’s role in modern dance and theatre, Garelick analyzes Fuller’s relationship with romantic ballet, Martha Graham and modern dance, and naturalism and modern theatre.

Fuller’s relationship with romantic ballet is usually viewed as a rejection of the art form (Garelick 10). However, Garelick asserts that rather than rejecting romantic ballet, Fuller engaged in dialogue with it (10). While Fuller was not a trained ballet dancer, her dancing did share some similarities with romantic ballet. Romantic ballet of the nineteenth century often portrayed women as mysterious, otherworldly creatures, ethereal and shimmering (Garelick 127). Fuller’s dancing also inspired comparisons to the spirit world, as she often danced under swirling yards of fabric that completely covered her body (Garelick 133). Garelick compares Fuller’s use of rods and silk in her performance to the legs of a ballerina (148). In what Garelick refers to as an upside-down version of ballet, she remarks that Fuller’s arms, extended by thin rods that pointed through her fabrics, seemed a near perfect imitation of the contrast between the tutu and the leg (148). Garelick states that Fuller also played with romantic ballet conventions in her stagecraft inventions (150). When dancing, Fuller often employed the use of mirrors, thereby creating multiple dancing reflections of herself (Garelick 150). Garelick compares these dancing reflections to the corps de ballet (150). While investigating the connections between Fuller’s dance and that of the romantic ballet, Garelick is careful to note the paradox that exists in the relationship (150). Fuller vehemently rejected some components of romantic ballet such as
narrative, character and story line (Garelick 150). She also refused to adopt the ballerina’s status as an erotic commodity (Garelick 150). While, as I’ve noted, other scholars have studied Fuller’s dance as a rejection of romantic ballet, Garelick employs a comprehensive analysis of the complex relationship between the two. Garelick maintains that it is in acknowledging Fuller’s debt to romantic ballet that we can best see how she enacted its transition to modern dance (154).

Garelick also explores the connection between Fuller and Martha Graham. Fuller is generally viewed as a pioneer in modern dance, a starting point on a time line that leads to Graham as the pinnacle. Garelick, however, refuses to reduce Fuller to precursor status, remarking that to do so indicates that Fuller lacked an understanding of what she was doing (Garelick 9). To probe the relationship between the two dancers, Garelick compares the use of breathing techniques and fabrics in Fuller’s La Mer to Graham’s Lamentation (188). In La Mer, Fuller used a large piece of fabric, manipulated internally by seventy-five dancers, which pulsed and waved onstage (Garelick 188). In Lamentation, Graham encased her entire body in a tube of lavender elastic jersey, leaving only her face, hands, and feet exposed (Garelick 190). Graham was seated during the performance; therefore, the only movement she performed was a series of contractions and releases, designed to harness the power of breath (Garelick 191). For Graham, the contractions offered a way to make the confrontation between the body’s internal existence and its outer environment visible (Garelick 191). Garelick sees Graham’s breath work in Lamentations as similar to Fuller’s breath work in La Mer. Garelick remarks that La Mer showcased how Fuller’s solo work employed the power of air (188). Fuller inflated and deflated her fabric through manipulation of air currents in a manner much like the breath work used by Graham (Garelick 188). While Graham is frequently credited with the use of breath work in
dance, Garelick claims that Fuller was using a form of breath work prior to Graham. Garelick acknowledges Fuller not as someone merely setting the stage for Graham, but as someone whose performances themselves were inherently important to the development of modern dance.

Finally, Garelick examines the relationship between Fuller and European modern drama. Garelick observes that Fuller’s role in modern drama has seemed fixed and obvious, that she was an inspiring proponent of mechanics (200). Critics cite Fuller for her technical contributions to the field, which are in alignment with the depersonalizing, abstract stage concepts of artists such as Adolph Appia, Ernst Stern, Pavel Tchelitchev, and Gordan Craig as well as Futurists such as Flippo Marinetti, Giacomo Balla, and Enrico Prampolini (Garelick 200). Garelick argues that Fuller’s contributions existed not only in the realm of stage design, but also in other theatrical elements that reached deeply into dramatic composition and technique, character realism, emotional depth, acting, and identity (203). European modern drama was becoming more naturalistic and like the naturalists, Fuller had a fascination with scientific detail (Garelick 208). Fuller consistently staged dramatic revelations of interiors, human organs, microscopic creatures, and heavenly bodies (Garelick 208). Garelick compares Fuller’s spirit to that of August Strindberg because she opened the stage to an array of intimate daily actions normally hidden from spectators (209). When naturalists were proclaiming that the proscenium opening needed to become a “fourth wall,” Fuller had already experimented with the concept (Garelick 209). In 1898 Fuller performed on stage in a glass box; she could not see the audience through the glass, only reflections of herself. Thus, this lack of acknowledging the audience served as a “fourth wall” (Garelick 209).
Garelick states that the goal of her book, *Electric Salome: Loie Fuller’s Performance of Modernism* was to reweave Loie Fuller back into the fabric of performance history (200). Her ambition was not to deprive Fuller of the position she has come to occupy as a pioneer but to demonstrate the limitations of such a label and to further reveal how Fuller’s art possessed the ability to illuminate fluid connections between genres (200). By investigating unexplored connections, Garelick discovered deeper relationships between Fuller and romantic ballet, modern dance and modern drama. In relation to romantic ballet, previous scholarship stated that Fuller had completely discarded the art form. In her association with modern dance, Fuller was considered a precursor, someone who served only to pave the path for Graham. Fuller’s role in European modern drama was simply as an individual who contributed design elements. Realizing that the research had barely scratched the surface concerning Fuller’s relationship with romantic ballet, modern dance and modern drama, Garelick launched an extensive investigation into these areas. *Electric Salome: Loie Fuller’s Performance of Modernism* achieves what Garelick intended and enhances theatre and dance scholarship by placing Fuller in a deeper, more critical dialogue with dance and drama (16). Furthermore, her ideas prompt my investigation; as like Garelick, I consider Fuller in relation to modern dance.

In *Mastering Movement: The Life and Work of Rudolf Laban*, John Hodgson compiles all of Laban’s theories and breaks them down into thirty-two principles or patterns that he believes convey the fundamental components of Laban’s methods of movement (168). Hodgson discusses Laban’s theories regarding the function of movement, how bodies move, and where bodies move (177, 178). Laban believed that in order for the body to move with full capacity it had to be fit and healthy; therefore, one had to maintain good posture and suppleness of the spine (180).
However, Laban did not think that movement was merely a physical expression, but rather a physical manifestation of an inner impulse. Laban’s approach to movement was holistic and he recognized the interrelationship between internal spirituality and external movement (205). Hodgson not only discusses Laban’s theories concerning dance, but also how his ideas relate to the voice, drama, education, work, recreation, and therapy (viii). Hodgson provides me with the typology and vocabulary I need to explore the similarities and differences between Fuller and Laban.

In *Expressionism and Modernism in the American Theatre: Bodies, Voices, Words*, Julia A. Walker discusses the Delsarte method. She explains the development of Delsarte’s movement schema through his empirical observations of everyday life in Paris, to extreme situations such as a mine disaster (Walker 43). Walker notes, “From such observations, Delsarte then divided the body into expressive zones, systematizing the various possible combinations of movement and ascribing a meaning to each” (43). Delsarte created a schema based on his observations, and actors wishing to portray a certain emotion could consult his chart in order to portray that emotion. Walker also details how the Delsarte method was brought to the United States through Delsarte’s student Steele MacKaye. She discusses the problematic nature of MacKaye’s teaching of the theory and how practitioners of the Delsarte method in the United States may not have possessed a full understanding of Delsarte’s intentions for his method (Walker 51, 52). Walker provides me with the historical background of Delsarte, as well as an understanding of his acting method, which I need in order to explore how both Delsarte and Fuller employ inner life in their movement.
In *Dancing Through History*, Joan Cass details the history of romantic and classical ballet. She discusses historically important ballet choreographers such as Beauchamps, Petipa, and Fokine. Examining these choreographers’ contributions to ballet is helpful in tracing the development of this codified system of movement. She also discusses the shift in ideas from classical ballet to modern dance and how modern dance rejected classical ballet as the foundation of dance (Cass 175). She also describes some of the tenets of modern dance as well as the techniques and theories of individual modern dancers such as Duncan, Wigman, and Humphrey. Cass provides a historical narrative of classical ballet and modern dance that is helpful because it enables me to discuss the development of ballet and the codification of its movement, and compare it to the innovative movement that was happening in modern dance. However, her historical narrative is also problematic because of her claim that modern dance commenced in the early 1900s and her situation of Fuller as a forerunner to the movement (Cass 224, 234).

Each of the above pieces of literature offer helpful information and scholarship regarding either Fuller, modern dance, ballet, Symbolism, Laban, or Delsarte. While others have written on Laban and Delsarte, I have limited the scholarship I use in this thesis to those I’ve discussed above, as they were the most directly related to my study. I will now move forward to examine Fuller’s modern use of space, body, and inner life in relation to Symbolism, Laban, and Delsarte. In Chapter Two I will explore how both Fuller and the Symbolists use space to represent inner emotion and spirit.
CHAPTER TWO: LOIE FULLER AND SYMBOLISM: THE REPRESENTATION OF INTERNAL ESSENCE IN A THEATRICAL SPACE

Fuller was performing in Paris during a time of incredible political and cultural change. She was dancing at the Folies Bergère during the establishment of the Third Republic of France. The Third Republic was constituted in 1870 after the collapse of the empire of Napoleon III in the Franco-Prussian War (Holmes 30). After the war, the new Republic wanted to create a sense of stability for the residents of France. The government encouraged the increasingly urban population to go out and buy consumer goods in order to keep the economy stable (Holmes 30). This was also the beginning of the era known in Paris as the “Belle Époque.” This epoch was characterized by many avant-garde artistic movements including Realism, Naturalism, Decadence, Symbolism, and Futurism,1 to name a few (Holmes 35).

Considering Fuller in light of this tensive moment in the history of France, Anne Cooper Albright in *Traces of Light: Absence and Presence in the Work of Loie Fuller* states,

Arriving in Paris at the cusp of a century and in the midst of many cultural changes, Fuller appealed to a broad group of theatergoers. With amazing foresight, she combined the romantics envisioning of light as a magic fluid, illuminating sublime moments of transformation with the Symbolists’ desire for suggestion and metaphor as well as prefiguring a modernist sensibility to the mobile relationship between figure and ground. (51)

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Because Fuller arrived in Paris at a moment of great aesthetic flux, traces of these ideas may be found in her work. One of the artistic movements apparent in Fuller’s work is Symbolism.

Fuller was dancing at the Folies Bergère while many Symbolist plays and productions were being produced in France. In her performances, Fuller seems to exude many of the artistic principles that the Symbolists firmly upheld. Both Fuller and the Symbolists were interested in the representation of inner life on stage. The Symbolists strove to find ways to use technical elements such as lighting and scenery to portray the hidden mysteries of the human psyche (Drain 228). Fuller, meanwhile, endeavored to use light, color, costume, and movement to communicate her internal emotions and spirit. What Fuller and the Symbolists have in common in regard to their performances is their desire to use space as an avenue through which to explore internal ideas. While Fuller never identified herself or her work as Symbolist, examining her dance in light of Symbolist ideas regarding theatrical practices elicits interesting results.

In her Serpentine Dance, Fuller appears to have exhibited several of the ideas that the Symbolists strove to achieve in their theatre. Regarding Fuller’s relationship with Symbolist aesthetics, Albright states, “When Fuller combines light, space, and color to channel an idea through her body and into the world, she is mobilizing what the Symbolists call synesthesia - the rhythmic flowering of multiple aesthetic sensibilities into one vision” (80-81). In this chapter I will examine the interface between Fuller and Symbolism in order to align her sensibilities with those of other modern dancers. Essential to this investigation is an understanding of symbolist aesthetics as well as Fuller’s ideas regarding her personal aesthetics. Ultimately, I will explore the ways in which Fuller’s dance potentially manifested Symbolist theatrical ideals regarding light, color, space, the body, and the mind in order to argue that through the amalgamation of
these elements, her performances created a synthetic whole that abstracted her body from conventional ideas of time and space and constructed a performance that was uniquely Fuller, but one that also places her firmly within the category of a modern dancer.

**TENETS OF SYMBOLISM**

Symbolism was a movement that originated in Europe in the mid to latter half of the nineteenth century. It was based on the tenets that the corporeal world was not knowable and that the only way to discover deeper truths was to delve into the human psyche. In *Theater of the Avant-Garde 1890 - 1950*, Bert Cardullo and Robert Knopf describe the concepts that the Symbolists were exploring:

> The world, which the realists and . . . the naturalists had attempted to know fully and depict accurately, was revealed by the Symbolists to be pure illusion - a veil of fleeting appearances behind which were hidden deeper truths. It was what lay buried within the psyche and concealed behind the mirror that this radical new poetics of drama proposed to explore. (6)

The Symbolists were not concerned with materiality of the world, as the naturalists or realists were. Instead, they were interested in the ethereal, the hidden mysteries residing within the self and the universe. Symbolist plays and productions were not focused on creating realistic or naturalistic elements on stage. Acting, scenery, lighting and sound did not adhere to nineteenth century conceptions of realism and naturalism. Instead, the Symbolists aspired to evoke feelings of otherworldliness and intangibility in their productions. Cardullo and Knopf note, “the Symbolists liberated playwriting from mechanistic notions of chronological time and Euclidean space; they enlarged the frame of drama to include worlds and beings other than those inhabiting
the bourgeois theater” (7). For Symbolist plays and performances, events did not have to occur in a linear fashion, nor were they confined to three-dimensional space. Time could move at a hyper speed or it could stand still, and movement in space could take place outside the rational, Euclidean three-dimensional world. Not only were the Symbolists interested in unconventional views regarding time and space, they were also fascinated by atypical manifestations of the body. They were extremely interested in the abstraction of the human form. Specifically, they were intrigued by the idea of using marionettes in their performances because puppets have bodies that are similar yet different from the human body. Cardullo and Knopf comment on the Symbolist preoccupation with the marionette, “Because marionettes are abstractions of the human form, individual experience does not obtrude on our perception of them, as it inevitably does with a human performer when the actor’s personality comes into play” (7). The marionette provides a body that resembles, yet is very different from a human body. When a human body is used in a performance it carries with it certain meanings and connotations, whether it is the roles that person has played in the past or even their personality outside the theatre. A body can never be free from meaning, but a puppet supplies the solid mass of a body without the associations, or baggage of reputation that might accompany an actor’s body.

FULLER’S AESTHETIC CHOICES

Before discussing how Fuller’s work can be read through a Symbolist aesthetic, I will first describe how she combined light, color, space, and movement. In her dances, Fuller used each of these components in a manner that had not been seen previous to her performances. Albright examines the use of these elements in Fuller’s performances. She claims, “Fuller’s use of light, space, and color reasserted her aesthetic agency to reclaim the terms of her own
representation” (51). Instead of employing her body as the sole representation of her performance, Fuller incorporated light, space, and color in a way that created a representation onstage that was a fusion of these elements. In her performance Fuller used combinations of three-dimensional lighting that allowed for the strategic illumination of her dancing; these combinations created a dialogic relationship in which light and color became sources of active exchange with her movement (Albright 51). Color and light were not an afterthought in Fuller’s work; they were vital components of the performance. Albright remarks, “With light, space, and color, as well as fabric, as her dancing partners . . . Fuller was able to fashion a visual spectacle that played across a continuum of meaning ranging from abstract design to otherworldly environments” (51). However, Fuller’s performances were more than the sum of these theatrical components (Albright 52). Even though she performed the same dances and implemented the same lighting effects multiple times, her performances were never identical. Albright asserts, “Much like a structured improvisation, her dancing allowed the audience . . . to follow the new and surprising combinations of movement, fabric, and light to witness the moment of genesis, and to experience in real time the creation and re-creation of her kaleidoscopic images” (52). Though Fuller choreographed and rehearsed her dances before she performed, the full expression of her dance was generated when she performed onstage for a live audience. The unpredictable connection between momentum and gravity in her performance opened a responsive space in which audiences could help construct how they wanted to focus on the assortment of images at play (Albright 52). In her performances Fuller incorporated light, color, and movement in a way that created a cohesive whole. This fusion of elements created an active performance space
wherein audiences were freer to construct their own experiences, as they could choose which visual elements upon which to concentrate.

In her performances, Fuller used light as a dynamic partner to reveal and conceal the motions of her body (Albright 55). Fuller’s use of light broke through scenic conventions of the time and extended her performances beyond traditional frames of nineteenth century dancing (Albright 55). Fuller developed many of her own lighting techniques and is considered an innovator in the field of lighting design. Albright notes that journalist Arsène Alexandre stated in his column in *Le Théâtre*, “Before . . . Fuller, there was lighting, but no one understood how to use it . . . She brought us this marvelous discovery: the art of modulation, the ability to shift across the spectrum of color tones” (58). Fuller discovered that one way to reduce the glare of the lights was to project them through a screen, a cloth, or glass (Albright 59). Fuller is also credited with the development of under-stage lighting. She had an electrician below the stage who projected light through a trap door which created the effect of her skirt being lit from underneath (Albright 61). Fuller patented her lighting inventions in the United States, France, and England (Albright 61).

Fuller’s use of lighting in her performance emerged from her understanding of the affective emotional qualities of color (Albright 66). She employed a multitude of colors in her work; consequently, her performances have often been described as kaleidoscopic. Fuller played with color and light in a way that challenged the nineteenth century notion of audience as subject and dancer as object (Albright 67, 68). Albright asserts that “much theatrical dancing of the nineteenth century, whether it was on the ballet stage or in the music halls, relied on a scopic economy of gaze in which viewer and dancer are positioned as subject and object” (67). When
these audiences viewed dance performances they were accustomed to perceiving the line of a
dance (Albright 68). Albright notes that line can refer to the structure of symmetrical lines of a
group of dancers onstage or the line of a dancer’s body, such as the line of the ankle or leg (68).
Albright states that in many dances, “the endings of musical phrases were often punctuated by
individual or group poses that visually consolidated line” (68). Because the ends of musical
phrases were accentuated by a pose and a visual line, the audience knew where they were
supposed to direct their gaze. However, Albright claims that Fuller increasingly refrained from
the use of line and pose in her performances, instead focusing on experimentation with light and
color (68). Regarding the significance of Fuller’s focus on light and color as opposed to line,
Albright quotes Bernard Howell’s essay on color theory, in which he states,

Line separates artificially objects and parts of objects from each other; it creates stable
conceptual identities and emphasizes the psychological distance between perceiver and
perceived. Color, on the other hand, blurs the distinction between subject and object.

(qtd. in Albright 67)

While Fuller did create lines to some degree in her movement when she swooped her giant
wands of fabric through the air, she did not pose and hold the line; she continued to move so that
her body and the temporary line were never static, but always fluctuating. Fuller’s use of light
and color blurred the visual relationship between her and the audience because she did not use
ending poses containing visual lines to mark where she wanted to audience to look. Albright
states, “[Fuller] created a new visual economy that demanded spectators take a more active role
in perceiving and registering the various images she evoked” (68). Instead of using static line and
pose to inform the audience where to focus, Fuller employed a combination of color, light, and movement that let the spectator decide where they wanted to concentrate their attention.

FULLER AND SYMBOLISM: THE INTERFACE BETWEEN THEIR AESTHETICS

Fuller’s lighting techniques evoke similarities with what the Symbolists expressed as their ideal for stage lighting. Gosta Bergman, in *Lighting in the Theatre*, explains the importance of the use of light in the Symbolist theatre. He states, “It goes without saying that light was to play a central role in the Symbolist dreams of the all embracing work of art: not the atmospheric illusionary light, but the light that, with all degrees of intensity and colors, can form inner, mental courses of events, can create rhythm” (Albright 81). Gosta claims that the Symbolists were not interested in light that only cast an otherworldly glow, but in the combination of light and color that seemed to create a visual pattern. This statement could describe Fuller as well as the Symbolist theatre because Fuller used light and color variation in a way that created a visual flow that was then layered on top of her movement. Just as the Symbolists strove to use light as part of an all-embracing work of art, so did Fuller. She strove to combine patterns, color, and light intensity, and weave them together with space, costume, and movement to create her own all encompassing work of art.

Fuller also shared many of the same sentiments regarding art and the body of the performer as her contemporary theatrical practitioner and lighting designer, Adolphe Appia. In “From How to Reform Our Staging Practices,” written in 1904, Appia states, “Until now it has been believed that staging must achieve the highest possible degree of illusion; and it is this principle . . . which has barred our progress. I strive to show . . . that scenic art must be based on the one reality worthy of theatre: the human body” (Drain 16). Thus, for Appia all elements of
scenic design should be constructed in conjunction with the human body. He goes on to assert that “the plasticity of scenery [is] necessary to the beauty of the actor’s attitudes and movements” (Drain 237). Appia claims that the scenery should not just be the backdrop that the actors performs against; instead, it should be malleable and able to move and adjust in accordance with the performer’s body onstage. He goes on to assert, “In the theatre, we are there to be present at a dramatic action: that action is due to the presence of the characters on stage; without the characters there is no action. Thus the actor is the essential factor in the staging of the scenes” (italics in original) (Drain 237). Once again, Appia maintains that the human body is a vital component in the equation of performance on stage. All the scenic elements should work in harmony with the body and together they should create a cohesive whole.

Appia also discusses the importance of creating an active theatre space as opposed to an inactive one (Drain 238). He states, “So no longer at any stage of [the] vision will [the] picture be an arrangement of inanimate painting; instead it will always be animated. The staging of the scene thus becomes the composing of a picture in time” (Drain 238). The staging of scenery is about creating an active space that the performer can exist in. It is not about creating a beautiful backdrop that the actor can walk in front of, but clearly has no connection to the actor’s body. It is about using scenic elements that contribute to creating a cohesive whole with the actor’s body onstage. Fuller also employed this idea of an animate or active stage space. She did not perform in a static stage space; her movement, costumes, lights, and colors worked together to create a picture in time, as Appia said. Her dance was not merely performed in front of a backdrop, but was a moving composition. The picture it created in space was fleeting because it ended as quickly as it began, but it left a great impression on those who watched it. Her dancing, flowing
costume complete with wand extensions, lighting, and color created a sense of wholeness onstage.

Fuller is an excellent example of Appia’s ideas regarding the fusion of the body and scenic elements onstage. For Fuller, lights, color, and space were equally as important as her choreography. She did not create her choreography and then layer in costume, lights, and stage space. Instead all elements were combined together to create the performance; each component was equally important. The performance was not just Fuller dancing, but combined light, color, space, and movement to create a complete piece of art.

Along with using unique forms of light, Fuller also employed innovative methods of engaging stage space. As I’ve noted, Appia discusses the significance of creating an active theatre space and Fuller accomplishes that task in her performances. Rather than accepting the stage as a static frame, Fuller considered it an active space (Albright 63). Concerning active space Albright notes, “Space can be haunting or inviting. Dancers can puncture it, embrace it, or recede from it . . . they can dive through space or be sheltered by it” (63). Fuller recognized the dynamic energy present in the performance space and used it in her dances. She worked with an awareness of extending her body beyond her personal space to engage with the space around it (Albright 63). She used light and fabric to mark the lines of her energy and reached beyond herself to create a complete sensory interaction with the whole stage (Albright 63). Her sense of engaging space begins in the way she initiates movement through her chest and body (Albright 3). As I’ve noted, Fuller’s movements radiate out of the central core of her body. Engaging her core enables Fuller to support and sustain not only her movement, but also her billowing costumes and fabric. Albright remarks, “Launching and guiding the fabric in a constant play with
gravity, Fuller creates an ongoing spatial dialogue of extension and release” (65). Because Fuller understood the importance of actively engaging her body in space, she was able to recharge the spatial and temporal energies of the stage (Albright 66). Fuller was a dynamic performer because she understood the importance of creating a cohesive whole; that light, color, space, and movement must be used in collaboration with one another. It appears that her performances melded these elements together to create what Appia referred to as an animated stage (Drain 238).

In Fuller’s Serpentine Dance, her body appeared to be both present and absent while she danced. This absence and presence of the body becomes an interesting template for thinking about the Symbolist idea of the abstraction of the body. In order to fully investigate absence and presence in her work, I will examine a performance of her Serpentine Dance that was filmed in 1896 by the Lumière brothers. In this film, Fuller dances in her famous costume composed of billowing fabric with wands attached to the sleeves so that she is able to manipulate and extend the costume above her head and diagonally to the sides. In the film, Fuller dances and as her body becomes enveloped in fabric it eventually disappears, and as the fabric continues to move her body eventually reappears. The motion of the dance and the movement of the fabric along with the play of light and shadow cause Fuller’s body to be both visible and invisible, both absent and present. When her body is not present it appears as though there is a whirling colorful “other” on stage, not a body or a human, but an abstraction of the human form. Eventually, her body will briefly come into view again and thus remind the spectator there is indeed a human body performing onstage. However, then the body will evanesce and all the eye will perceive is the whoosh of colorful perpetual motion as the body disappears, reappears, and disappears.
Symbolist writer and critic Stéphane Mallarmé describes the phenomena of Fuller’s dance as “the personification of his dream of the ideal theater - without scenery, without words, where space and time had no importance, where reality would not intrude between the idea and the audience” (Coffman 93). Mallarmé indicates that Fuller’s performances, executed without scenery or words, were not constrained by realistic or naturalistic ideas of space or time. Her Serpentine dance did not follow a typical dance progression, which would have consisted of beginning in a pose, ending each phrase with a pose, and ending the performance in a pose. Instead, she eliminated pose from her dance and performed continuous movement throughout the entire performance. Because of this perpetual motion, it is possible that it caused those observing to lose track of time and thus to be enraptured by the experience. Her resistance of the conventional dance and pose technique and her use continual motion in this dance aligns her with the Symbolist tenet of resisting the realistic/naturalist constraints of chronological time. Her performance emancipates her body from the constraints of linear progression, and in this space where time seems to not exist she creates with her movement and costumes the appearance of a supernatural “other.” Fuller also evokes the idea of a supernatural “other” in the names of many of her dances, such as the Serpentine, the Butterfly, and the Fire Dance. Each of these dance titles elicits images that distance Fuller’s dancing form from that of a human.

In her performance, her body is abstract because it is obscured by the fabric of her costume and the dynamic interplay of light, dark, and color. But performed in a space where time seems absent and the continual motion of her movements and costumes make her body both visible and invisible, it seems that her body becomes abstracted to a second degree. The otherworldly qualities of her performance seem to abstract her completely from the idea of the
human form. This quality of her performance aligns her with the Symbolist desire of abstraction, which was mentioned earlier regarding marionettes. As I noted, the Symbolists were interested in marionettes because their form was similar to the human body yet not quite human. In the Serpentine Dance, Fuller takes a human body and abstracts it from its humanness by enveloping it in the motion of the costume, and then makes it even more abstracted by taking this form that is both visible and invisible and situating it in a realm where time does not exist. Therefore her human body becomes something that does not exist in the human perception of time or space. A human body cannot be both present and not present, nor can it make time stand still. Yet in Fuller’s performance her human body seems to succeed in achieving both of these tasks.

Through the combination of movement, costume, and light, Fuller’s body appears abstracted and the visual images she creates evoke representations of non-human forms. Mallarmé in “Les fonds dans le ballet” describes such an experience: “In the terrible bath of fabrics fans out, radiant, cold, the performer who illustrates many spinning themes from which extends a distant fading warp, giant petal and butterfly, unfurling all in a clear and elemental way” (qtd. in Albright 45). Mallarmé watches Fuller’s body, clothed in fabric, light, and color disappear and then re-emerge in the non-human form of a flower and then a butterfly. Albright remarks on other representations that Fuller has been compared to, “Images of phantoms, wings, birds, gemstones, water, and flowers -- these are the fundamental metaphors that are echoed throughout many of the early descriptions of Fuller’s performances in Paris” (38). The abstract images evoked through Fuller’s Serpentine Dance manifests the Symbolist desire to shake free from realist representations and to manipulate the audience’s apprehension of chronological time on stage.
In addition to emancipating onstage bodies from the rational ideas of form and chronological time, the Symbolists were also interested in probing the inner mysteries of the mind. They were interested in investigating the internal aspects of the mind and the psyche and making these internal elements external in their plays and performances. Katherine E. Kelly in the *Introduction to Modern Drama by Women 1880s-1930s* notes that at this moment, writing was “shifting its representation center from the outside to the inside, from the natural/material realm to the individual/mental realm as the crucial site of awareness” (11). In her writing, Fuller discusses a similar idea regarding working from the inside. In “From Light and the Dance,” Fuller states, “What is dance? It is motion. What is motion? The expression of sensation. What is sensation? The reaction in the human body produced by an impression or an idea perceived by the mind. A sensation is the reverberation that the body receives when an impression strikes the mind” (Drain 246). Fuller thereby makes the connection that dance is a physical manifestation of a mental impulse. The external expression of the dancing body is created by an internal stimulus. Fuller and the Symbolists clearly both shared a desire to probe the inner workings of the mind and to make them physically present on stage.

In “From Light and the Dance,” Fuller explains how she takes a mental impulse and makes it physical; she translates the image in her mind through her dance to the audience. She avers, “To impress an idea I endeavor, by my motions, to cause its birth in the spectator’s mind, to awaken his imagination, that it may be prepared to receive the image” (Drain 247). Through her dance, Fuller attempts to transcribe an image from her mind to the mind of the audience. Her goal in this process is to simultaneously get audiences to understand an image in her mind and moreover, to be an image in their mind. She is trying to get them interested in both her inner
mental workings and her outer physical workings. If audiences understand the outer image of her dance they will also understand the inner image in her mind. When she states, “to cause birth in the spectator’s mind,” Fuller indicates that she expects her audience to engage with her not only on an aesthetic level, but also on a mental level. She wants her audience to not only process her images visually, but also mentally, so that her physical actions act as a mode of communication between her brain and her spectator’s brains. Regarding this form of communication Fuller states, “Thus we are able . . . to feel within ourselves as an impulse an indefinable and wavering force, which urges and dominates us” (Drain 247). Fuller indicates that using her dance as a physical form of inner communication between her and the audience creates a force between the two that is both tangible and intangible. It is palpable in the sense that she knows that it exists and that there is a transfer of something and ineffable in the sense that it is not quantifiable.

Fuller’s attempt to communicate her inner images through her exterior movement was not to assert that audiences were unable to construct their own experience, since spectators could choose which element or combination of elements on which to focus. However, I think that Fuller believed that the power of the inner impulse was so strong that it would be communicated through her performance no matter upon which visual element the audience chose to focus. Her desire to create an entire performance including lights, color, fabric, and movement all evolved from an internal idea, and that concept would be disseminated through every element of the performance.

Another place where Symbolist ideas and the performance of Loie Fuller converge is with their interest in mirrors. The Symbolists were preoccupied with the idea of looking into the mirror and seeing the “Other” version of your “Self” reflected back at you. Frazer Lively notes
the Symbolist fixation with mirrors in her “Introduction to The Crystal Spider,” “motifs that were common to symbolist writers [were] . . . the dangerous enchantment of mirrors” (271). She goes on the explain that this fascination with seeing the “Other” in the mirror alludes to the myth of Narcissus, the man who sees his own reflection in a pool of water and becomes enamored with it (Lively 271). This interest in mirrors and the reflected self is apparent in many Symbolist writings, paintings, and theatre.

Loie Fuller was also interested in playing with the reflection of the “Self” in her performances and created a means by which she could dance and have her image reflected at the same time. In 1893 Fuller patented a devise that she called a “mirror room” (Garelick 45). Garelick describes this invention saying, “The mirror room was an octagonal backdrop, open in the front, made up of continuously arranged mirrors illuminated by tiny electric lights installed in the interstices. This curving wall of lights and mirrors created multiple reflections of the dancer performing before it” (45). Fuller would dance and her image would be reflected all around her, thus producing multiple images of her form. Consequently, not one human body, but many were reflected and refracted in the performance space. According to Garelick the audience had a difficult time determining which of the dancing bodies onstage was actually the flesh-and-blood Loie Fuller (45). From this account it seems that just as the Symbolist were interested in the merging of the “Self” and the “Other” in the mirror, so too was Fuller. It appears that she was interested in what happened onstage when the physical dancing body converged with the reflections of the dancing body. Mrs. Griffith, a British writer who saw the Serpentine Dance performed in the “mirror room” described its affect on her. She explains, “By some mysterious arrangement, eight Loie Fullers appear to be dancing at the same time, and the whole stage is
bathed in a flood of glorious tints, in which may be seen aerial forms, in cloudlike vestures, whirling and dancing . . .” (Garelick 45). This audience member describes Fuller’s performance with her multiple reflections and combination of the lighting effects as something celestial or otherworldly. Garelick notes that “The mirror room. . . both dissolved and reproduced Fuller’s image” (45). By dancing in a space with mirrors Fuller’s physical body dissolved because it became difficult to differentiate which body onstage was Fuller’s actual body. However her body was also reproduced, because the mirrors allowed not just one dancing body onstage, but multiple dancing bodies.

The idea of absence and presence once again manifests itself in the mirrored performance. Fuller’s body is visible because she is onstage performing. But it is also hidden, because at times during the performance it becomes hard to extricate Fuller’s physical body from the reflections. Her experimentation in the “mirror room” with the Symbolist concept of the “Self” and the “Other” lead to the creation of multiple images in the mirror which added to the ethereal sense of the performance. Instead of one body disappearing and reappearing, there are multiple bodies. Because the “mirror room” set was so large and breakable she could not tour with it, so she began experimenting with other ways of using mirrors (Albright 191). Albright comments, “Instead, Fuller adapted the play of light and mirror by using large swaths of shiny, reflective fabric, or by sewing mirrors on [her] costumes” (191). Even though she could not always use the large mirrors, the use of mirrors and the reflection of her image was something that she continued to experiment with and to implement in different ways throughout her career.

This mystical ambiance that Fuller created with her dancing and her use of mirrors further connects her with Symbolist ideals. According to Lively, “the symbolists wanted a theater
of the soul, in which a mystical inner life would transcend the corporeal world” (269). In the way that Fuller discusses her process it seems as though this Symbolist idea was implemented in her work. She would have an impression or image in her mind that she would then “transcribe” to her body. She would perform this transcription, combining dancing, lights, and the mirrors (if they were used) to create a mystical, ethereal, mysterious place where her inner self could seem to transcend her corporeal body, where her physical body became absent and present and where time seemed to not exist. The combination of her being both concealed and revealed as well as the effort to transcend linear time indicate that for Fuller’s audience, the performance seemed to exist somewhere between the real world and the supernatural world.

This liminal space between the real world and the imagined is also something with which the Symbolists were concerned. Lively explains, “Many [symbolist] plays showed . . . characters . . who seem to exist partway between the real world and beyond” (269). Fuller’s performance seems to fit this description; in the moment that it is occurring it seems to exceed the bounds of the natural world. Albright describes the phenomena by saying, “Beginning with dim lighting (often described as “eerie”), her movement typically became more and more expansive as the surrounding lights increased in intensity and color variation, creating a climatic (sometimes apocalyptic) vision that exploded back into darkness” (66). The description of Fuller’s performance as a climatic or apocalyptic vision reinforces the idea that Fuller’s dance created a space that existed somewhere between the real world and that which is beyond the real world.
FULLER’S UNIQUE FUSION OF PERSONAL AND SYMBOLIST AESTHETICS

This otherworldly vision that she created in her performances was not created by movement alone, but with the help of other scenic elements. It is the synesthetic combination of Fuller’s moving body enveloped in the elements of light, space, and color that create the whole effect. These components working together as a whole create a transcendent space where Fuller’s performance resides. It is Fuller’s unique combination of these elements that constructs the synesthesia. She created her own lighting plots using original techniques and color palettes, which she also designed. She fashioned her own costumes, made of fabric that undulated as she danced. The wands connected to her costume allowed her to reach beyond her personal space and engage far beyond herself. When she danced in this costume her body was both revealed and obscured. Albright notes that in a 1905 edition of *Les Arts et La Vie*, Roger Marx described all these components coalescing,

Here, center stage is the dancer, arms stretched out with her wands, swinging her ample sleeves into circles and vast, parallel figure Ss. Here she is now, lifting the fabric above her shoulders in erect pillars, coiling curls, twisted spirals, turning it into wild waters, rising, swelling, and then sinking waves swirling furiously under the gusts of an unseen cyclone. While the rhythm accelerates, the cadence rushes and then the charming creature disappears among the frames and halos of the surrounding spirals, faster the tones alternate and cross, tones of vermeil, and foliage, of azure and blood red; faster they disintegrate, mingle and marry; topaz to lapis, emerald to amethyst, ruby to sapphire, moonstone to aquamarine; the fabric dizzily bubbling, borrows all the iridescences and, as a rainbow takes all the nuances of the decomposing prism. The vision is never as vivid
and passionate as in its vanishing moment when it sinks into naught and turns into darkness. (qtd. in Albright 54)

The amalgamation of Symbolist ideals and Fuller’s own philosophies regarding all of these elements -- the lights, the colors, the engagement with space, the costume, the presence, the absence -- all constructed a synesthetic whole that transcended conventional ideas of time and space and created a performance that was uniquely hers, but was also specifically united with the burgeoning aesthetic impulses of the time.
Rudolf Laban and Loie Fuller both exhibited the desire to break free of formalized, rigid forms of movement. Both demonstrated movement characteristic of modern dance in their performances, including the motion of the torso, the use of the entire body, and an awareness of the weight of their movements. Exploring the movement used by Fuller through the techniques employed by Laban provides a deeper understanding of the significance of Fuller’s bodily movement. In this chapter, I will investigate the dance of Loie Fuller, specifically her Serpentine Dance, and the movement technique of Rudolf Laban in order to demonstrate that they were executing similar movements in their work. Moreover, given that Fuller slightly predates Laban indicates that her work presciently incites the transition to modern dance. In so far as Fuller’s movements radiated from the central core of her body and that she supported and sustained her movement by engaging her body in extension and release, Fuller employed elements in her dances similar to those techniques used by Laban. Comparing and contrasting the dances of Fuller and Laban reveals that modern movement was not a systematized form of movement as was ballet, but rather a cultural phenomenon simultaneously present in both the United States and Europe that inspired innovations in movement. While modern dance was not codified as a whole, some modern dance innovators did attempt to systematize their theories. Laban was one of the dancers who did so; he established a vocabulary that enabled dancers to talk about movement and provided a notation system that allowed dancers to document movement. Laban’s movement vocabulary allows me to put Fuller’s bodily movement into articulation. By analyzing
Fuller’s bodily movement within the context of Laban’s movement vocabulary, my aim is to generate a deeper understanding of the physical rigor that was present in her dance and also to situate her as an individual who was exercising modern movement in her dances.

Essential to the understanding of how Fuller created the movement in her performances is a comprehension of her dance and theatrical career. Fuller did not have formal dance training; instead, her performance experience consisted of vaudeville, burlesque, melodrama and various other theatrical forms. Her unique form of performance consisting of light, color, fabric, and movement perhaps coalesced as a fusion of elements derived from her varied theatrical background. Also critical to the study of Fuller’s bodily movement is the development of her Serpentine Dance, which evolved from a theatrical performance.

FULLER’S PERFORMANCE HISTORY

Fuller’s dance career officially began in 1878 when she moved from Illinois to New York and performed in vaudeville and burlesque productions (Garelick 23). During this time Fuller participated in many different kinds of performances and dances. Her various types of performances ranged from cross-dressing as a boy to kicking up her exposed legs in the risqué “tights dance” (Garelick 23). In 1883 she went on tour with “Buffalo Bill” Cody’s Wild West Show and played Miss Pepper, a deserted waif, in The Prairie Waif (Garelick 24). Garelick describes the performance as “[a] play [that] was one in the series of open-air melodramas that comprised the Wild-West Show, all of which featured highly detailed tableaux of western life, shooting displays . . . and stories about American expansionism and the colonizing of Native Americans lands by white settlers” (24).
Throughout the 1870s-1880s, Fuller continued to participate in an assortment of diverse performances. One specific performance that influenced her later work was her portrayal of Mrs. Imogene Twitter in *Quack, M.D.* at the Casino Theatre in Holyoke, Massachusetts (Garelick 28, 30). In this production, Fuller created her own costume made out of long, white silk and gauze. In the play, her character is hypnotized and Fuller created movement to depict the hypnosis. In *Fifteen Years of a Dancer’s Life*, Fuller recounts the conception of her character’s movement. She states,

[The doctor] raised his arms. I raised mine. Under the influence of suggestion, entranced -- so, at least it looked -- with my gaze held by his, I followed his every motion. My robe was so long that I was continually stepping upon it, and mechanically I held it up with both hands and raised my arms aloft, all the while that I continued to flit around the stage like a winged spirit. (Fuller 31)

As Fuller flitted around on stage in her flowing costume, people in the audience began to exclaim, “It’s a butterfly! It’s a butterfly!” (Fuller 31). Fuller continues to describe the experience, “The doctor all the time was gliding around the stage, with quickening steps, and I followed him faster and faster. At last, transfixed in a state of ecstasy, I let myself drop at his feet, completely enveloped in a cloud of the light material” (31, 32). This was Fuller’s first experience combining movement, fabric, and light and she recognized the creative power of this fusion. Regarding this revelation she declares, “Unconsciously I realised that I was in the presence of a great discovery, one which was destined to open the path which I have since followed” (Fuller 33).
To fully explore her movement ideas, she brought her costume from the show home and practiced these “hypnotic” movements in front of a mirror. Standing in front of a mirror in her costume she stated, “Golden reflections played in the folds of the sparkling silk, and in this light my body was vaguely revealed in shadowy contour” (Fuller 33). Looking at her reflection, she noticed that the fabric both concealed yet revealed the form of her body. Once Fuller was clothed in her costume she began to dance. She describes this experience saying, “Gently, almost religiously, I set the silk in motion, and I saw that I had obtained undulations of a character heretofore unknown. I had created a new dance” (33). Fuller recognized that her synthesis of movement, fabric, and color was something new and exciting. Her manager named this dance the “Serpentine Dance” (Fuller 38).

The Serpentine Dance discovered through her performance in *Quack, M.D.* would become the foundation of her future work. After requesting a raise and being denied, Fuller left the cast of *Quack, M.D.* She was replaced by dancer Minnie Renwood who was told to imitate the movements that Fuller had created for the role (Garelick 30).

Fuller went on to perform solo Serpentine Dances throughout the United States. In 1892, she moved to Paris and discovered that the Folies Bergère was employing Maybelle Stewart, one of her imitators (Garelick 1). Fuller quickly secured an audition at the Folies Bergère and after watching her performance, director Edouard Marchand hired her and fired Stewart (Garelick 1). Now employed by the Folies Bergère, Fuller expanded and experimented with her signature style of dancing. She mentally conceived and physically executed dances evoking images of fire, butterflies, and flowers (Fuller 93, 181, 261). Fuller performed at the Folies Bergère for an unprecedented three hundred consecutive nights (Garelick 3).
MOVEMENT IN THE SERPENTINE DANCE

Fuller’s Serpentine Dance provides a specific example that demonstrates how she used the core of her body in her dances. In this dance, Fuller kept her body engaged in perpetual motion while launching the fabric of her costume into the air by the wands that she held in her hands. In order to fully comprehend how Fuller employed her body in the Serpentine Dance, Albright remounted it. Albright discusses that when she first began to work with a replica of Fuller’s serpentine costume, it took all her energy just to keep the fabric sustained in the air (30). However, the more she practiced and experimented with her movements and the fabric the more efficient and fluid the movements became. She attributes this development to using her whole torso to sustain the movement of her upper body (Albright 30). Albright states, “I also learned how to exploit the diagonals such that my movements were not simply to the front, the sides, or above, but included powerful figure-eight sweeps that went from up to down and looped back behind my body as well” (30). She discovered that in order to launch the wands of fabric and keep them suspended in the air, she had to use diagonal motions as opposed to just waving the wands to her front, back, and sides. She goes on to assert, “Eventually, I realized that rather than focusing on lifting my arms, I needed to release my weight and accelerate into the downswing, after which I could let go of the effort and ride the upswing into a loft” (Albright 30). In her remounting of Fuller’s Serpentine Dance, Albright realized the movements in the dance had little to do with swinging the arms and had much to do with involvement of the core of the body. To launch and keep the fabrics in the air Albright had to twist her torso. Of this movement she notes, “The key ingredient here is the torque of the body, that quick twist of the torso, which functions much like the handle of a whip to send the peripheral extensions of the fabric up into the
air” (Albright 30). By remounting Fuller’s Serpentine Dance Albright discovered that underneath the billowing costumes Fuller was not merely waving her arms around. Instead, her movement was radiating from the core of her body. The twisting and contracting of her torso enabled her to have the momentum to lift her long wands of fabric and to keep them extended while she danced. Fuller’s use of the torso firmly situates her in the category of modern dance.

Fuller’s Serpentine Dance became very popular and many other dancers tried to imitate it. However, Fuller’s name had been marketed so well by the end of her run at the Folies Bergère, that she did not need to worry about imitators (Albright 38). After performing at the Folies Bergère, Fuller performed the Serpentine and other dances at various venues throughout Europe and America. By the mid 1890s, the public knew Fuller as an original and authentic artist (38). As she continued to travel and perform her various dances, the number of her imitators began to grow. However, Fuller was always regarded as the original and the best. Albright points out that there are many press articles from the time comparing Fuller to her imitators and that they always declare the superiority of Fuller’s performance (Albright 38). One particular article states, “To rival the pictorial beauty of contemporary burletta and operetta, the variety theatres have their lantern dances, in which Loïe Fuller is still supreme, in spite of her many imitators” (qtd. in Albright 38).

Fuller always stood apart from her imitators. Perhaps her performances seemed more authentic because she understood how to employ her entire body in the dance. She was not just twirling fabric with her arms. Her movement radiated from her torso; she twisted and contracted her body to release the fabric and keep her body in motion. In 1896 the New York Times ran an article on Loie Fuller, in which Fuller gave some advice to aspiring dancers (Albright 39). In the
article Fuller proclaimed, “There are 500 people -- little misses -- who can twirl a few yards of
muslin and bob in and out of the focus of a limelight, but twirling a few yards of fabric and
playing at touch with the limelight -- any girl who is given to kicking her toes at all can do that --
do not make a skirt dancer” (Albright 39). This statement clarifies Fuller’s belief that her dances
were different from her imitators. She belittles these other dancers as merely “twirling muslin”
and “bobbing in and out of the limelight.” Albright notes that in this article Fuller distanced
herself from working-class variety entertainments; she viewed herself not as just a dancer, but an
artist (39). While Fuller did not articulate that the difference between her dance and her
imitators’ dance was the use of the torso, it is evident that she understood there was something
different. While it was surely in her best interest to differentiate herself from other dancers,
perhaps the difference was in how she moved her body. I believe what set her apart and made her
performances so compelling to the audience was that she used her whole body.

LABAN’S DANCE HISTORY

Rudolf Laban first became interested in dance in the early 1900s when he moved to Paris
and saw Isadora Duncan perform in the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt. Of this performance he wrote,

The main achievement of Duncan was, however, that she re-awakened a form of
dance-expression . . . She reawakened the sense of poetry of movement in modern
man . . . This dancer had the courage to demonstrate successfully that there exists in the
flow of man’s movement some ordering principle which cannot be explained in the usual
rationalistic manner. (Bergsohn, Partsch-Bergsohn 3-4)

Laban hailed Duncan’s abilities and was fascinated by her movements in space (Bergsohn,
Partsch-Bergsohn 4). Clearly, this performance left a significant impression on Laban and also,
clearly, he was influenced by other modern dancers. The concept of “dance expression” would leave a strong imprint on Laban as later in his career he would discuss dance as a movement of expression. As noted in Chapter Two, just as Fuller believed that physical expression was the result of an internal impulse, so too did Laban.

In 1912, Laban began to study various systems of *körperkultur* (the culture of the body,) of which Rudolf Bode, Bess Mesendieck, and Emile Jacques-Dalcroze were leading proponents (Bergsohn, Partsch-Bergsohn 6). Laban strongly believed in the connectivity between the body and the spirit. He referred to this as the “inner attitude” and used this phrase to describe the dynamic changes in the expressive movement of the dancer (Bergsohn, Partsch-Bergsohn 6). In *A Life for Dance: Reminiscences*, Laban discusses the relationship between the body and the inner spirit. He declares, “Dancing needs the whole, living person and plenty of space into which he can project his happiness or sadness” (3). For Laban, dancing was not just about moving the limbs; it was about engaging the entire body and spirit in motion. The movement of the body emerged from an inner impulse or emotion, what he designated as the “inner attitude.” Whole body movement developed out of the connection between body and spirit, and it materialized from an inner desire. Laban’s thoughts about whole body movement emerging from an inner idea are very similar to Fuller’s ideas that exterior physical movement should be incited from an internal desire. Fuller and Laban both share the modern idea that dance should not be superficial movements pieced together, but instead dance should emanate from an inner desire to express. Laban’s theories also ally well with Delsarte’s acting theory, which I will discuss in Chapter Four.
Laban began to more fully develop and cultivate his theories regarding whole body movement and space when he moved to Monte Verità, Switzerland in 1913 and began an artistic colony there. Laban called the colony the “School of All the Arts of Life” and the students who lived there participated in outdoor movement workshops (Bergsohn, Partsch-Bergsohn 8). It was at Monte Verità that Laban began to cultivate ideas regarding how the dancer should move in space. He developed the concept of space consciousness, which he described as “a person’s orientation in space, moving up and down, side to side, forward and backward; tension and release; and reachspace, the extension of the body in a particular direction, traveling curves, and spiraling falls” (Bergsohn, Partsch-Bergsohn 11). In these workshops, students worked together in groups and learned how to explore the possibilities of their own movement (Bergsohn, Partsch-Bergsohn 11). In 1917, the “School of all the Arts of Life” disbanded, but Laban remained in Switzerland and continued to teach movement, choreograph dances, and develop his theories regarding movement. During his lifetime, Laban traveled all over Europe and America teaching and implementing his ideas regarding movement.

Laban’s teaching and theories had a significant impact during his lifetime. After World War I he opened a dance school in Stuttgart, Germany and soon after many dance schools teaching his techniques appeared all over Germany (Newlove, Dalby 12). Between the two World Wars Laban’s influence continued to spread throughout Europe. He taught dance and movement not only in Germany, but also in Great Britain and Austria (Newlove, Dalby 13). Prior to World War II, Laban left Germany and moved to Paris (Hodgson xviii). In both places he taught, wrote, and gave lectures about his techniques. While Laban’s work was noteworthy during his life, it continues to have a lasting affect in the narrative of modern dance. His
movement techniques and theories are still being taught. His ideas regarding the impetus of movement in the body and the orientation of the body in space remain extremely significant to contemplating dance.

**LABAN’S THEORIES REGARDING MOVEMENT AND SPACE**

Over the course of his life, Laban wrote and published several books about his theories on movement. In *Mastering Movement: The Life and Work of Rudolf Laban*, John Hodgson compiles all of Laban’s theories and breaks them down into thirty-two principles or patterns that he believes convey the basic components of Laban’s conception of movement (168). For the purposes of this chapter, I am going to focus on pattern sixteen because it concentrates on the movement of the spine and torso and pattern seventeen because it explains Laban’s concept of the space in which the body moves, which he designates as the kinesphere. Examining these two patterns from Laban’s theories regarding the movement of the core and the way in which the body engages the kinesphere helps me frame my discussion of Fuller’s bodily movement.

“Pattern Sixteen: The Body and its Basic Movement” concentrates on the structure and stability of the body. Laban viewed the body as a horizontal and vertical structure that maintained architectural stability (Hodgson 178). When one part of the body moves the rest of the body compensates in an effort to keep the whole body stable and balanced. Laban viewed the body in three distinct parts: the head, the trunk, and the limbs. The head contained the senses, mental activity, and psychological activity (Hodgson 179). Laban’s division of the body into three components is, as we will see, similar to the way Delsarte divides the body in his method. The trunk houses the digestive and reproductive organs and is also the area of metabolic activity (Hodgson 179). The limbs (arms and legs) are involved with activities related to movement and
gesture (Hodgson 179). The legs transfer weight, leap, twist, turn, and help keep the body balanced, while the hands manipulate, hold, and touch (Hodgson 179). The head, trunk, and limbs are vital components of the architecture of the body. Their movement and orientation in space affect the balance and stability of the body. Laban also regards the spine as an important element that affects the movement of the body. He declares a need for renewed awareness of both the straightness and suppleness of the spinal column (Hodgson 179). Laban states that the alignment of the spinal column with the rest of the body is necessary to ensure the balance of the body and maintain its upright structure (Hodgson 179). However, Laban notes that few people make use of the full twisting and turning power of the spine because they have allowed their cartilage to stiffen or their muscles to slack (Hodgson 179). Laban asserts that the twisting ability of the spine is key to good posture and that good posture is a significant element for a fit body (Hodgson 205). Concerning Laban’s thoughts on the importance of posture Hodgson states, “Recognizing the structure of the body and working always with a regard for its symmetry, individual posture is a prime consideration and the basis for all activity. It is key to any sense of well being” (205-206). Thus, in the general movement of the body as well as in dance, Laban asserted the importance of maintaining balance between the three areas of the body and in using the spinal column to expand the body’s range of movement. Fitness and health were core elements of Laban’s theories because he believed that in order for the whole body to be engaged in movement, the physical instrument had to be fit and healthy (Hodgson 205). However, it was not only about physical health, but also about internal well-being and the connection between the two. Hodgson notes, “[Laban’s] is a holistic approach, recognizing the interrelationship of the inner and outer both from the point of view of the physical and the psychological” (204). At the
foundation of his theories, Laban believed that there should be a connection between internal and external well being and that through this union an open range of movement, including the flexibility of the spine, the strength of the abdomen, and the expansion of the chest and lungs is possible (179).

“Pattern Seventeen: The Body in Space” focuses on Laban’s thoughts regarding where the body can move in space. Regarding this use Laban notes, “Movement is change, and space . . . must be seen as the locality in which changes take place” (Hodgson 181). Movement could not happen if it did not have space in which to exist. Laban refers to the space in which movement takes place as the “kinesphere.” He describes the kinesphere as “the three-dimensional, globe-shaped space in which the body can operate (extending from the centre to the extension of the limbs)” (Hodgson 181). The kinesphere refers to space around the body of an individual as opposed to the more general space outside of their movement range (Hodgson 181). The kinesphere exists as far as an extension of part of the body can reach. Within the kinesphere the body can extend to reach the perimeter of the space or contract to take up little room in the space (Hodgson 181). Laban notes that there are several elements that affect the range of shapes the body can make within the kinesphere; they are dimension, proximity, planes, direction, and elements of space. Each one of these components informs the movement of the body within the kinesphere.

EXPLORING FULLER’S MOVEMENT THROUGH LABAN’S THEORIES

Using Laban’s movement vocabulary as a framework in which to examine his movement techniques and Fuller’s dancing reveals that they seem to have much in common. In their dancing, both used the core of the body, the rotation of spinal column, extension and release, and
possessed an awareness of kinesthetic space. Laban taught his students that in order to harness the full movement potential of their bodies, their impulse to move had to begin in the core of their bodies and they had to use the full twisting potential of the spine. In her Serpentine Dances, Fuller used her core and spine to launch her long fabrics into the air and to keep the rest of her body moving while she was twirling the fabric. As I’ve discussed above, Laban conceived the idea of the kinesphere as the three-dimensional shape that exists around the body and extends as far as the body can extend. There is no proof that Fuller was aware of this term or this idea of space, but in her dances it is evident that she was extremely aware of the space around her.

Regarding Fuller’s awareness of space Albright asserts, “Indeed, a key difference between music-hall dancing in Paris at the turn of the twentieth century and the kind of expressive dancing that Fuller worked with was this awareness of extending the body beyond one’s own kinesphere to engage the space all around” (63). In this quote, Albright implicitly references Laban to describe how Fuller engaged the space around her. In expanding her reach beyond her personal space she employed extension and release in her dances. As I’ve noted, Fuller would extend her arms, which held long wands attached to fabric, and then release them allowing the fabric to swirl in space. Regarding Fuller’s extension Albright remarks, “Fuller reached beyond herself . . . to create a sensate interaction with the whole stage” (63). Fuller used the combination of light, color, fabric, and extended wands to reach outside her personal performance space.

Another similarity between Laban and Fuller was their focus on continuous movement as opposed to movement that ended in a pose. Hodgson remarks, “Dance, on Laban’s principles, is not just the body in poses with variations. There is also emphasis on flow and uninhibited gesture” (223). For Laban, dance was about creating fluid movement. Perpetual motion is also
apparent in Fuller’s Serpentine Dance. Fuller did not use pose in her dances; she remained in constant motion for the duration of the dance. Albright discusses how Fuller broke free from formalized poses within her dance and how she employed the use of light in her quest, “Rather than being a static source that framed her various poses, light seemed to engage her dancing, to bring forth a variety of expressive responses to the elaborate shifts in color and intensity” (51). Also, as I noted in Chapter Two, Fuller’s dances were not punctuated by pose, but rather the beginning and ending of her dances were signaled by the rise and fall of the lights. Albright remarks, “Fuller’s dances seemed naturally to emerge from and recede into the dark” (70).

In so far as the extent of my research, there is no documentation that Fuller and Laban ever met and admittedly their styles of dance were very different. For the most part Fuller performed her dances solo and they usually involved billowing costumes and elaborate lighting. Laban performed many different styles of dance that frequently used large groups of people. His dances also tended to focus purely on the movement; he was not concerned with elaborate costumes or lights. However, these two dancers whose superficial dance aesthetics appear dissimilar seem to have something extremely significant in common. Both discovered new and similar ways of moving their bodies in space, ways that were uniquely modern.

MODERN MOVEMENT

However, Laban and Fuller were not the only people to exhibit such innovations in movement. As noted in Chapter One of this thesis, modern dance is not systematized form; rather it is a form of movement comprised of individuals who each posses their own ideas regarding movement. Nevertheless, even though every individual dancer had their own theories and techniques regarding movement, what united them together was what Schwartz identified as the
new kinaesthetic (91). Schwartz defines the new kinaesthetic as “clean, fluid, curvilinear gestures moving from the center of the body outward through uninterrupted but musically well-controlled rhythmic impulses” (91). This epoch witnessed the commencement of a new form of motion, a movement that radiated from the center of the body. As I noted, Schwartz attributes this new movement to the development and demonstration of powered flight (75). Regarding this innovation in movement Mary Wigman, a student of Laban’s stated, “It cannot be denied that our body awareness was unknown to any former generation the way it is now. Interest in physical movement, from all kinds of sports to artistic dancing, is now alive and will remain so” (35). Wigman recognized that this form of movement was something original, something previous generations had not experienced.

Schwartz mentions Laban along with Graham, Ruth St. Denis, and Isadora Duncan as dancers who exhibited torsion in their movement. Of these dancers Schwartz notes, “together [they] established a model of motion as a spiral at whose radiant center was a mystical solar plexus and at whose physical axis was a preternaturally flexible spine, bound link by link to the earth as to the heavens” (75). Albright uses Schwartz’s quote in her book and argues that Fuller’s name should be added to the list of dancers who employed this new movement in their dancing. She remarks, “most cultural historians and dance scholars elide Fuller’s movement contributions to early modern dance, preferring (if they mention her at all) to elaborate on her innovations in lighting and scene design” (31). While Fuller’s innovations in lighting and scene design are important, they should not overshadow her contributions to the changes in movement. Albright notes that perhaps one reason that Fuller’s dancing is often ignored is that it prefigures Schwartz’s notion of the “new kinaesthetic” (31). Fuller begins dancing in Paris in 1892 and
Schwartz heralds the arrival of the new kinaesthetic in 1904, so Fuller predates this concept by twelve years. However, Schwartz does note that shifts in ideas regarding movement began as early as 1840, and he references Delsarte’s as a harbinger of those ideas (71). But Schwartz asserts that those shifting attitudes did not fully gestate until 1904. Yet, Fuller’s use of her torso and engagement with her “kinesphere” challenges the notion that modern movement did not fully materialize until 1904.

Schwartz continues to describe Laban, Graham, St. Denis, and Duncan in a way that is also fitting of Fuller. He notes that in this new form of movement, “one bent one’s whole body to the whole music . . . one did not dance to single beats but to the phrase or the center line out of which flowed the rest of the music. Movement unfolded from the center of the body” (75, 77). This description could easily be about Fuller’s Serpentine Dance as Fuller did not punctuate beats of music with poses; instead she danced to the entire phrase of music and her perpetual motion did not end until the music was over. Her movement also unfolded from the center of her body and emanated from the solar plexus and the spine. Albright remarks, “Fuller had to use more and more torque to send her silks rising farther into the space around her. Arching and spiraling, her whole torso was involved in a movement task that was both expressive and functional” (31). The motion of Fuller’s limbs emanated from the movement of her torso. Fuller describes this process,

The length and size of my silk skirt would constrain me to repeat the same motion several times as a means of giving this motion its special and distinctive aim. I obtained a spiral effect by holding my arms aloft while I kept whirling, to the right and then to left, and I continued this movement until the spiral design was established. Head, hands, and
feet followed the evolutions of the body and robe. It is very difficult, however, to describe this part of my dance. You have to see it and feel it. It is too complicated for realisation in words. (34)

Fuller thereby describes this connection between her entire body and her costume as too complicated for words. Although her dance defied linguistic definition for her as she employed torsion or the torso, it appears that she was aware that she was executing something different from the typical dances of the period. She notes that the motions of her head, hands, and feet emerged from the movement of her body. Perhaps, then, on some level she maintained an understanding of the interconnectivity between the core and the limbs. It may be that she implicitly recognized how the inner self compelled this new use of body and space.

Examining Fuller in light of Laban acknowledges that even though they were working in different areas and that visually their dances seemed extremely different, they were both implementing similar movement techniques. This evidence situates Fuller in more prominent position in the modern dance narrative than previously thought. Fuller was not merely a trailblazer, she was a fully engaged member of the modern dance movement. Analyzing her work within the context of Laban’s theories reveals that both dancers used their torsos and engaged with the dynamics of the space around them. Both dancers exhibited the “new kinaesthetic” in their movement; they discovered how to move their heavier-than-air bodies in space. The key difference in their discoveries is that Laban developed the vocabulary to articulate his movements while Fuller did not. Fuller deserves to be recognized for her inventive movements right alongside Laban and other modern dancers. It is time to rewrite the narrative of modern dance, giving Loie Fuller the prominent place that she has earned.
CHAPTER FOUR: 
LOIE FULLER AND FRANÇOIS DELSARTE: THE EXTERNAL EXPRESSION OF INTERIOR LIFE

In her dancing and in his acting method, Loie Fuller and François Delsarte shared a desire to create physical expressions based on internal desires. Fuller was interested in creating movement that arose from an inner impulse, while Delsarte was interested in how the body evoked emotion and therefore focused on codifying the movements of the body. In this chapter, I use Delsarte’s acting method as a framework to explore Fuller’s ideas regarding the embodiment of expression in movement. Ultimately, I assert that examining Fuller’s ideas concerning the outward manifestation of an internal motivation within the context of the Delsarte method elicits the ways in which they both attempted to reject formal embodiment. In their work, they both aspired to create bodily movement that was not purely based on external aesthetics, but on interior spirit or emotion. Inner life was a key concept in both modern dance and theatre. However, Fuller and Delsarte did differ in the regard that Delsarte claimed that his theories were based in science, while Fuller did not.

CHANGES IN BODILY MOVEMENT

Essential to investigating Delsarte’s and Fuller’s theories concerning the connections between movement and inner impulse is an understanding of the shifting cultural ideas regarding movement. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, bodily motility was changing. People were discovering freedom in their bodies as they moved. Schwartz attributes this freedom of movement to being “uninhibited by corsets, heavy skirts, and narrow shoes . . . One used the whole foot, the whole torso, the whole body to move” (72). Now that corsets, skirts, and certain
shoes were no longer inhibiting movement, the whole body was able to engage in motion as people carried out their day-to-day business in a manner that had not been characteristic before. This transformation in movement was evident in both the United States and Europe. Patricia Vertinsky in “Transatlantic Traffic in Expressive Movement: From Delsarte and Dalcroze to Margaret H’Doubler and Rudolf Laban” quotes dance historian Ramsay Burt who states that “profound shifts in ideas around physical culture and efforts to liberate movement forms . . . were taking place in both Europe and America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries” (2033). Shifting ideas regarding mobility and the body were inspiring innovative forms of movement that manifested themselves in several art forms. Burt asserts, “The central concern of this move against formalism was a search for ‘real expression’ as opposed to creating artifices” (Vertinsky 2034). These new forms emerged as a reaction against their more formal predecessors. They focused on freedom of expression in movement. Attitudes regarding movement shifted from movements founded on classical forms such as ballet, which sought to defy gravity and elevate the body, to movements centered in the torso and grounded in the earth. The forms of movement fermenting at this moment accepted the corporeality and weightedness of the body and used these elements in their movement as opposed to working to create a movement that suggested that the body did not carry any weight.

Movement related to dance and theatre changed in many ways during this period. Acting methods were emerging that placed emphasis on the movement of the body as a mode of communication. Previously acting had been more focused on the voice as the means of communication in what was designated the “point” technique (Walker 13). Walker describes the “point” method as “a vocal or pantomimic technique designed to elucidate the meaning of a
dramatic text” (13). However, during the late nineteenth century acting methods were shifting from attention on vocal training to an emphases on physical training.

**THE DELSARTE METHOD**

François Delsarte was one practitioner teaching actors to use specific gestures and expressions as a way to convey meaning through the body (Walker 43). Delsarte, a French vocal instructor, created a system of actor training based on a catalogue of gestures and expressions to which he had attributed certain meanings (Walker 43). Schwartz remarks, “Delsarte’s lectures [were] designed to help actors, singers, and musicians understand the relationship between gestures, sentiments, and the senses” (71). Delsarte analyzed the varied expressions of different parts of the body to discover their emotive significance (Walker 43). In *Expressionism and Modernism in the American Theatre: Bodies, Voices, Words*, Julia Walker describes some of the expressions in Delsarte’s model of technique. She writes, “The hooded brow over the wide-open eye, for instance communicates ‘firmness’ or resolve, the open hand with fingers fully extended ‘exaltation’ and the wide spread legs ‘intoxication’” (43). Each of these movements, whether subtle or exaggerated, communicates a specific feeling in the actor. Walker notes, “In this way, the actor wishing to represent any one of these emotional states could refer to Delsarte’s schema, reproduce the appropriate gesture, and thus communicate an aspect of his or her character’s inner state” (43). The movement of the body, whether a shift of the eyebrow or a gesture of a hand, was regarded as extremely purposeful and always considered representative of the inner state of the character.

Even though Delsarte codified a system of movement, the system was not based on convention, but rather on nature (Walker 43). Delsarte constructed the acting method using his
own empirical observations (Walker 43). Walker states, “noting the behavior of people in the streets, parks, and cafés of Paris, Delsarte would record the various expressions, stances, and gestures he witnessed, even traveling to the scene of a mine disaster and visiting an insane asylum to observe expression in the extreme” (43). Delsarte watched and recorded the conventional as well as the exceptional movements of the body. He observed the body in commonplace settings and took note of how the body moves and communicates in everyday situations. He also examined the body in stressful and distressing circumstances in order to uncover how the body moves and communicates within such scenarios. It was through these everyday observations that Delsarte developed the schema for his acting method. Regarding Delsarte’s blueprint Walker claims, “Thus, actors, wishing to represent with scientific accuracy the various emotional states of their characters could appeal to the ‘natural’ laws of expression recorded by Delsarte” (43). Because Delsarte based his method on empirical observations he claimed that his studies were founded in science. Actors seeking to accurately portray natural human movement could consult Delsarte’s chart. Because the method codified movements of the body it was sometimes compared to the neoclassical system of rhetorical gesture (Walker 43). However, because Delsarte devised the movements based on empirical observations he argued that his system was not akin to neoclassical gesture because the movements were not based on convention (Walker 43). Delsarte sought to formulate a system that was not based solely on exterior physical movement but on the internal impetus of that movement.

From his observations, Delsarte divided the body into three expressive zones: the head, the limbs, and the torso (Walker 43, 44). He declared that these expressive zones were governed by three faculties: the limbs by life, the torso by the soul, and the head by the mind (Walker 46).
Walker notes that the philosophy behind Delsarte’s method borrows ideas from the theories of Johann Caspar Lavatet, an eighteenth century moral philosopher (46). Delsarte’s theories regarding the three faculties and the expressive zones of the body coincide with Lavatet’s theory of physiognomy, which “localized the three principal human faculties -- vitality, morality, and intelligence -- within specific regions of the body” (Walker 46). Delsarte adapted Lavatet’s theories into his own schema that were, as I noted, based on personal observations. Therefore, the expressions and movements of the limbs were centered on vitality and the physical nature of the body, the torso by morality and the soul, and the head by intelligence and the mind. However, Walker asserts that Delsarte did more than appropriate Lavatet’s ideas. She states, “From it, [Delsarte] elaborated a theory of bodily movement which indicated the dominant faculty within a person’s soul: movement about a center (normal) is moral and expresses soul; movement away from a center (eccentric) is vital and expresses life; and movement toward a center (concentric) is mental and expresses mind” (46). According to Delsarte, every movement of the body operates as normal, eccentric, or concentric. Walker notes, “Each of the three zones was capable of all three types of movement [normal, concentric, and eccentric]” (47).

The movements were also based on an inner instinct; an outward movement was a manifestation of an inner impulse. Regarding this Schwartz notes, “Delsarte taught a system of relating gesture to expression, expression to the soul” (71). Expression was a manifestation of an impulse in the soul and gesture was a physical representation of that expression. Delsarte himself stated, “To each spiritual function responds a function of the body; to each grand function of the body corresponds a spiritual act” (Schwartz 71). Delsarte thought that a physical manifestation of movement was the result of an inner impulse.
The combination of individual movements from the different zones created distinct meanings and expressions. Gestures and expressions could be combined in assorted ways to communicate various feelings. According to Walker, Delsarte “[systematized] the various possible combinations of movement and [ascribed] a meaning to each” (43). Each movement combination communicated a specific emotion or idea. However, this method was more than just a duplication of a set of gestures; the actor had to combine and coordinate various expressions and gestures involving different parts of the body (Walker 43). Delsarte’s method was not merely a “copy this” to portray this. Instead, he offered these gestures and expressions as building blocks, components an actor could combine and rearrange to portray and emote various character traits. Furthermore, Delsarte believed that when actors used his method they should not just mimic the exterior replications. Instead, the external replications should serve as a physical expression of the inner spirit or soul.

Delsarte’s acting technique was brought to the United States by one of his students, Steele MacKaye. MacKaye began training with Delsarte in 1869, and he returned to the United States in 1871 where he began teaching Delsarte’s method (Walker 43). Walker notes, “MacKaye’s lectures generated such a tremendous interest in the Delsarte method that it became the most popular program of actor training in the US from the 1870s until 1900, inspiring a host of other methods that traveled in its path” (43). Delsarte had planned to come to the United States, but died before he was able to make the journey (Walker 43). Consequently, the Delsarte method came to America through the teaching and lectures of MacKaye. If Delsarte had been able to travel to the United States, the vision of his work in the United States would probably have been much different from what materialized as a result of MacKaye’s interpretation of it.
MacKaye emphasized the physical or what he called the “gymnastic” elements of Delsarte’s technique (Walker 51). MacKaye’s version of Delsarte’s method seems to be an amalgamation of both Delsarte’s theories and Mackaye’s own ideas about movement. Regarding the boundary between Delsarte’s and MacKaye’s techniques Walker asserts, “MacKaye variously attested to the authenticity of, yet claimed credit for, the physical training method he referred to as ‘harmonic gymnastics’” (51). After his death, MacKaye’s wife described “harmonic gymnastics” as “a series of exercises that would condition the body to perform Delsarte’s gestures with greater ease” (Walker 51). It would appear that MacKaye wanted to capitalize on the popularity of Delsarte’s name while simultaneously proffering his own technique. “Harmonic gymnastics,” as well as other forms of movement and gymnastics which bear even less resemblance to Delsarte’s method, would be associated with Delsarte throughout a significant part of the 1900s. In fact, at one point Delsarte’s daughter, Madame Giraldy, visited the United States to observe the impact of her father’s method and was amazed to discover all the various methods using her father’s name that had little resemblance to his method (Walker 52). Walker describes the visit thusly: “Upon visiting a class on Delsarten movement for young ladies, [Giraldy] was surprised to be handed a pair of dumbbells, remarking that, however healthful the program of exercise, it bore no relation to her father’s method” (52). The Delsarte method synthesized through MacKaye started to draw negative criticism because of its emphasis on the actor’s body. It was criticized for relying too much on the actor’s physical instrument and not enough on intellect. Attacking the Delsarte method, as influenced by MacKaye, for this “problem,” critic Alfred Ayers declares, “The brain, not the muscles, is the seat of emotion, and emotion is well-nigh everything to the actor” (Walker 52).
This criticism is significant given that Delsarte’s original intentions for his method were that movement was to be guided by the life, the soul, and the mind. While physicality was a significant element in Delsarte’s technique, it was not the only component. As noted earlier, Lavatar’s philosophy regarding the three faculties, vitality, morality, and intelligence, was a major influence on Delsarte. He thought that outward, physical movement was connected to the interior faculties. The criticism that Delsarte methods were not intellectually based seems to be a result of MacKaye’s highly physical interpretation of Delsarte’s techniques.

**DELSARTE’S INFLUENCE ON MODERN DANCE**

Delsarte’s methods interpreted through MacKaye appear to have had a huge influence on changing ideas regarding movement and dance in America. Several modern dancers, including Ted Shawn, Ruth St. Denis, and Isadora Duncan, studied and were influenced by Delsarte via MacKaye. In 1898 Duncan declared, “Delsarte is the master of all principles of flexibility, and lightness of the body, who should receive universal thanks for the bonds he removed from our constrained members” (Schwartz 72). While Duncan proclaims the glory of the Delsarte method and gives him credit for freeing the body from reserved movement, she is also implicitly speaking against ballet and other forms of formalized embodiment. Of the influence of Delsarte on American modern dancers Schwartz notes, “Ignoring his rigid equations of specific gestures with specific meanings, American dancers took from Delsarte his concern for the absolute integrity of gesture, his attention to the expressive power of the torso and his desire for movements liberated from highly mannered codes of motion” (72). American dancers of the time were influenced by Delsarte’s ideas regarding the liberation of the body and by the attendant discovery of an inner impulse that radiates into a physical exhibition of movement.
FULLER’S METHODS

In “Women in Motion: Loie Fuller and the ‘Interpenetration’ of Art in Science,” Elizabeth Coffman claims that Fuller studied with MacKaye at an early age (81). If this statement is true, it points to an interesting connection between Fuller and Delsarte. Even though Fuller would have studied under MacKaye’s version of the method, she still would have been exposed to some Delsartean ideas. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, Fuller articulates ideas regarding dance that resonate with Delsarte’s idea of the origination of movement from an inner feeling. This connection provides some intriguing considerations as I explore Fuller’s ideas regarding the connection between inner expression and outer movement and how she may have been influenced by Delsartean theories.

In her essay, “From Light and Color,” Fuller discusses her opinions about the relationship between inner feelings and outward expressions. She claims, “Our knowledge of motion is . . . primitive . . . We say “prostrated by grief,” but, in reality, we pay attention only to the grief; “transported with joy,” but we observe only the joy; “weighed down by chagrin” but we consider only the chagrin” (Drain 246). Fuller considers the idea that people take note of the emotion of expression explicit in each of these statements, but they don’t connect that to the verb, the motion in the phrase. She uses these phrases as examples of the ways in which movement and emotion are connected and asserts that movement of the body is always connected in some way to an emotion or expression, an inner impulse or feeling. She goes on to state, “Throughout we place no value on the movement that expresses the thought. We are not taught to do so, and we never think of it” (Drain 246). She claims that people do not think of the physical responses their bodies have to their inner thoughts and feelings. But those inner impulses create a physical
response of a certain degree, whether it is subtle or exaggerated. Fuller describes instances of the inner desire triggering a physical reaction. She asserts, “Who of us has not been pained by a movement of impatience, a lifting of the eyebrows, a shaking of the head, the sudden withdrawal of the hand?” (Drain 246). An inner feeling has sparked each of these outwardly observable movements, a feeling that caused the body to respond in a very specific way. Here we can see how her thoughts regarding the initiation of movement correspond with Delsarte’s ideas. Both think that the impulse to move the body comes from an interior motive. Outward movement does not just happen on its own accord; it must be fueled by an internal motivation. Delsarte observed these outward motions and noted what emotion they appeared to evolve from and recorded them in order to employ them for this acting method. Likewise, Fuller incorporated her ideas about the connections between movement and inner impulses in her dances.

Fuller’s dance appears to be a reaction against the predominate classical dances of the period, namely ballet. Regarding ballet she notes, “At present dancing signifies motions of the arms and legs. It means a conventional motion, at first with one arm and one leg, then a repetition of the same figure with the other arm and other leg” (Drain 246). Thus, she articulates her lack of enthusiasm for this form of dance. She appears to believe that this repetition of movement fails to depict the core of what she believes dancing should be. She goes on to note her disinterest in this conventional form by stating, “[The dance] is accompanied by music, each note calls for a corresponding motion, and that motion it is unnecessary to say, is regulated rather by the time than by the spirit of the music” (Drain 246). Rather than being inspired by the spirit of the dancer, Fuller’s point is that the dance must therefore conform to the rigid standards of repetition of movement and phrases of music. Fuller bemoans, “So much the worse for the poor
mortal who cannot do with his left leg what he does with his right leg. So much worse for the
dancer who cannot keep in time, or, to express it better, who cannot make as many motions as
there are notes” (Drain 246). In these reflections she appears to think that dance should not be
reserved for and performed by only those who meet the conventional standards of dancing. As
discussed in the introduction, Fuller adheres to the modernist idea that dance is not just for the
elite, but rather for anyone who possesses the desire to move their body. She urges a conception
of dance that goes beyond and breaks free from the severe strictures of ballet that have been
placed on the human form. In order to combat these conventional definitions and restrictions of
dance she declares, “Music, however, ought to indicate a form of harmony or an idea with
instinctive passion, and this instinct ought to incite the dancer to follow the harmony without
special preparation. This is true dance” (Drain 246). Instinct should guide the dance, not rigid
guidelines and pre-planned choreography. Fuller goes on to declare, “the human body should,
despite conventional limitations, express all the sensations or emotions it experiences. The
human body is ready to express, and it would express if it were at liberty to do so, all
sensations” (Drain 247). From Fuller’s perspective, dance ought to be able to take on whatever
form the inner body is guiding it towards. It should embody the feelings and expressions present
within the body.

Fuller employed these ideas in her dances. She structured them more as an improvisation
as opposed to a choreographed dance. Because of her inclination to do this Albright states, “The
interplay of movement, fabric, light, space, and color in her performances was always changing,
always in flux” (52). The components of her dance were continually fluctuating. She was
constantly rearranging and experimenting with new ways of using these elements in her dances.
Albright goes on to note, “Even though she tended to repeat the same dances over and over again, sometimes with slight variations, they were never exactly the same from one performance to another” (52). While of course Fuller did rehearse her dances, they were nevertheless not reproduced with the same phrases of movement in every performance, for, as I have noted she allowed for and encouraged improvisation based upon her instinctive passion (Albright 52). In contrast to her dancing, she was known for rehearsing her lighting cues with painstaking exactness (Albright 52). Albright notes that in an 1896 New York Times article Fuller remarked on her meticulous lighting rehearsals claiming, “I drill my light men, drill them to throw the light so, or so, and they have to do their business with the exactitude of clockwork” (39). While she demanded accuracy from her lighting technicians, she left her movement open to the inspiration from within to discover how the inner impulse shaped the dance for that performance. Of this notion Albright asserts, “Dance, for Fuller, is not something one creates out of a void, but rather a natural energy that one harnesses and channels into different expressive possibilities” (77). For Fuller, dance is not merely the arrangement of different motions of the body. It is not just a superficial, repetitive motion of moving an arm and a leg and then duplicating it on the other arm and leg. Movement materializes out of something deeper, out of an inner urge to physicalize an experience or emotion. Albright goes on to describe Fuller’s ideas about the inclination to move; she states, “The vibrations of an experience or idea produce a sensation that results in an expressive motion or dance” (77). The remnants of an occurrence or feeling trigger a physical response in the body, this physical response can be harnessed into a dance. For Fuller, it is not about choreographing the perfect dance or employing impeccable technique. It is about creating movement that to her was an authentic representation of inner life. It was about making the
outward motion match the inward sensation. Albright asserts, “In [Fuller’s] model of artistic engagement, aesthetic harmony comes not from a perfect arrangement per se, but rather from a sensitive and mutual responsiveness to events already in motion” (77). For Fuller, harmony is not created through flawless choreography and execution of the dance. Instead, it comes from an inner inspiration and a willingness to play with the movement in an improvisational way that aligns with the inner impulse of the moment.

Both Delsarte and Fuller appear to be seeking a way to understand the inner impulse that compels and authenticates movement. What they have in common is that they both are interested in the connection between interior life and outward expression. Even though their desires to investigate this relationship led them down different paths, both explored innovative ways of moving the body. Both were interested in not only moving the body, but also in understanding the connections between what causes bodies to move and how the movement happens. They also thought that movement should capture emotion in its physical expression. Delsarte’s schema was not just movement for movement’s sake; rather, it was motion that evolved from an inner emotion and in its physical manifestation communicated that emotion to the audience. Delsarte believed that his system was helpful for actors because instead of singularly relying on their voice, they could also use their body as an instrument of communication. Similar to Delsarte, Fuller distinctly rebels against movement that is purely aesthetic and formal in her performances and in her writing. As noted earlier, in her writing Fuller discusses that movement should not just be repetitive motion of the limbs, but something deeper. Fuller also thought that deep emotion which incited the movement should be both present and visible in the movement. This visible
emotion is present in many of her dances, particularly her “Fire Dance.” I will discuss how she used emotion in this dance further on in the chapter.

Where they differ in thought is that for Delsarte, this connection between the internal and the external meant observing physical reactions to emotions and situations, while for Fuller, it meant being attuned to one’s desires and impulses and letting them influence the dance rather than fulfilling a set routine. Delsarte often commented that he employed scientific method in the development of his theory. Perhaps in a similar fashion, Fuller’s theories were based upon her explorations in the practice of her work. Fuller created some of her dances while observing herself in a mirror. It could perhaps be argued then that because she employed empirical self-observation while constructing her movement, her dances may have likewise had a scientific basis. While Fuller does not articulate the idea that her work is based in science it is an interesting notion to contemplate that perhaps in some sense it is. In many of her performances, Fuller does have some interesting connections with science and technology. In some of her dances, she projected images from microscopes and telescopes onto fabric. In the next section I will discuss the similar ways in which Delsarte and Fuller created physical expressions that evoked emotion and the dissimilar ways in which they employed scientific techniques in their work.

EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL EMOTION

While both Fuller and Delsarte thought that external expression should evolve from an internal impulse, they also believed that the inciting emotion should be captured in the physical manifestation. According to Walker, Delsarte’s method adhered to “the rule that one’s outward action necessarily revealed his or her inner essence” (50). The inciting emotion is thus present
both internally and externally. Walker goes on to note, “Delsarte held that there was a mystical yet identifiable correspondence between one’s inner moral character and the expression, gesture, and comportment that were its outward signs” (50). Delsarte’s intention with his method was to emphasize the connection between the internal and external expressions. However, when MacKaye taught Delsarte’s method in the United States, he stressed the physical elements of the technique and therefore the significance of the inner emotion lost emphasis (Walker 51). Walker asserts, “Although the Delsarte method was designed to help actors express various moral-psychological states of being, its focus on the body -- the arms, legs, head, eye, etc. -- continued to leave actors vulnerable to the charge that theirs was manual rather than intellectual work” (51). This was criticism placed on the American version of Delsarte’s method, which had clearly been distorted by MacKaye.

It is interesting that Fuller is said to have studied with MacKaye because even though she would have learned Delsarte’s technique through him, she communicates ideas that are similar to Delsarte’s original method. As discussed in Chapter Two, Fuller talks about conceiving an image in her mind, creating movement based on the image, and then communicating that image to an audience through her dancing. She talks about communicating with her spectators on both an internal/mental and external/physical level.

This idea of communicating emotion through physical expression is apparent in Fuller’s performance of “Fire Dance.” Fuller first performed Fire Dance in 1896 and continued to perform it at various times throughout her career (Albright 70). Regarding her use of light, color, and fabric in the dance Albright notes, “In [Fire Dance] Fuller used underlighting very consciously to hone the interplay between light and shadow. Sometimes she would step over the
light to reveal her whole face bathed in red; at other times she would play at the edge of the light, allowing only a sliver of her body or costume to catch the light” (70). Fuller used her original combination of light, color, fabric, and movement that was absent and present to evoke the image of a fire. Albright references Jean Lorrain’s famous quote in *La danse*, in which he describes Fuller’s performance of the dance:

Molded in the middle of ardent embers, Loïe Fuller does not burn; she filters and oozes light she herself is the flame. Erect in glowing coals, she smiles, and her smile seems a mocking grin under the red veil in which she is wrapped, the veil she moves and waves like a smokescreen down her lava-like nudity. It’s Herculaneum buried under ashes, it is also the Styx and the infernal shores, and it is also Vesuvius with its half-opened mouth spitting the earth-fire; this immobile nudity which is still smiling in the embers of a fire from heaven, with hell as a veil (qtd. in Albright 70-71).

Through her dance, Fuller created not only images of a generic fire but specific representations of a flickering flame, oozing lava, burning coal, and smoldering ashes. She used light, color, costume, and movement, as well her theories regarding the creation of physical images through internal emotion to devise a performance that communicated intricate visual images. According to Albright, “In the view of many critics, ‘Fire Dance’ engaged the expressive possibilities of Fuller’s theatrical presence, using her movement and the lighting effects to not only please their eye, but also to grab their guts” (72,73). Fuller’s performance of Fire Dance was both visually pleasing and compelling to the audience. Albright asserts that because of the dance’s effect on the audience, “the dance was both abstract and emotional” (73). The images created in the Fire Dance offer an illustration of Fuller’s thoughts regarding inner impulse and outer manifestation.
Another interest that Fuller and Delsarte shared was science. Delsarte was interested in empirical observation and thus he set out to establish his acting method through a scientific method. While Fuller used some observation in the development of her dance, she did not declare that that her movement was based on a scientific method as Delsarte did. Rather, her explicit interest in science was demonstrated when she incorporated technology and scientific themes into her dances.

Regarding Delsarte’s method and its association with science, Vertinsky states, “Delsarte claimed that his system was a fully scientific approach to the body but it was designed to accompany oratory, to focus on ‘gesture as the direct agent of the heart’” (2034). Delsarte believed that his method was founded in a scientific investigation, but that the movements he observed were demonstrations of inner emotions. Regarding this coalescence Coffman declares, “Delsarte claimed that from harnessing the ‘powers’ of body and spirit, ‘results the intimate fusion of art and science . . .’”(79).

As noted earlier, Fuller did incorporate scientific elements into some of her performances. Garelick comments that themes related to astronomy and biology were especially fascinating to Fuller (53). Garelick states that in several of Fuller’s dances including Les Nuages, Le Firmament, and Land of Visions that “Fuller used photographs of the moon, taken with an aid of a telescope. She then printed the photographs onto her glass slides, and danced as lunar images drifted across her body” (53). Fuller also used scientific images in her Dance d’acier or Dance of Steel. In this performance Fuller projected photographs of cancer cells and skeletons of fish onto a canvas backdrop (Garelick 54). Garelick remarks on the irony of these projections noting, “They also display an ingenious sleight of hand, for at the same time that Fuller was denying
audiences even a glimpse of her own body occupying the interior of her vast costumes, she was inviting them to peer at far more hidden and private natural spaces, belonging to other living bodies” (54). This is also compelling in regard to Fuller’s interest in the external manifestation of internal things. By projecting cancer cells and fish skeletons she was making visible these hitherto invisible internal artifacts. In these dances Fuller used slides to project “scientific” images upon her body; thus, the images and light from the slides added an extraordinary element to Fuller’s already unique combination of aesthetic elements.

Both Fuller and Delsarte sought to create a form of movement that was representative of the inner self. They believed that inner emotion and spirit should be the impetus of motion and also be physically present in the movement. They rebelled against extremely discrete notions of movement, asserting that when a body moves it should not be based purely on aesthetics, convention, or systematized dance steps. Instead, movement should radiate from the inside, from an inner impulse to create “truthful” motion that is a combination of internal motivation and external physicalization. This distinctly modern impulse, to originate motion from an internal desire, is clearly exhibited in both Fuller’s and Delsarte’s movement. This is further evidence that Fuller, and perhaps even Delsarte, should be situated as modern movers.
Loie Fuller’s integration of light, color, and fabric fused with her understanding of space, internal life and bodily movement created a performance that was one of a kind. Fuller’s rejection of formalized dance, her incorporation of her torso, and her desire to create movement from the inside out positions her as a modern dancer. However, because of historians’ desire to create a tidy, linear narrative of dance history, Fuller has typically been placed as a predecessor to modern dance. As I have indicated throughout this document, Albright and Garelick are two scholars who are attempting to re-situate Fuller as an active participate in modern dance. My hope here is to further consolidate that re-situation.

However, many dance history books only briefly mention Fuller, usually as someone who preceded modern dance. For example in Dancing through History, a book that is often used in dance history classes, Fuller is briefly mentioned in a section called “Forerunners” (Cass 224). In Dance as a Theatre Art: Source Readings in Dance History From 1581 to the Present Fuller is given a short mention in the preface to the section on modern dance. This section states, “As a dancer, Fuller had no particular technical equipment, but she created a novel form of movement and revealed a tremendous potential for dance in the imaginative uses of lighting” (Cohen 119). This statement claims that Fuller’s dancing was not important in and of itself; rather, it was important because it showcased innovations in the use of lighting in dance performances. Certainly, Fuller’s incorporation of light in her performances was significant because she believed that lighting should be an essential element of the dance, not something to be added in after the dance is choreographed. However, this fusion of light was not the only consequential
component of her work; her bodily movement was also a critical element. While she did not
eexecute technique in a way that a formally trained dancer would, she implemented her own
technique in her dance. She conceived her dances from an inner impulse, which was foundational
to her technique. In her dances, she physically expressed internal emotion and spirit, and did so
in an individualistic way that shook free from the rigid formalism of classical ballet. She also
eschewed the idea that one had to be a trained dancer in order to perform. While Fuller’s

technique may not be visible in the way that balletic technique is, after all unlike the leotard and
tight clad ballerina, Fuller’s use of body was primarily hidden from view, it does not mean that
she did not have a method.

When Fuller performed at the Folies Bergère she was known as a celebrated and
accomplished dancer who was adored by many fans; yet many dance history scholars only
mention her in passing. Albright ponders this conundrum stating, “Fuller was one of the most
famous dancers of her time, but she was later marginalized by modern dance history” (10).
Fuller, a prominent persona within the *zeitgeist* of turn-of-the-century Paris seems to have been
left by the wayside in dance history. Albright states that when Fuller arrived in Paris in 1892 she
entered a “world of an increasingly commercialized popular entertainment and a rising celebrity
culture” (87). In Paris, Fuller was known not only as a dancer, but also as a celebrity whose
image was commercialized in the popular media of the period. Albright remarks on the
popularity of Fuller:

> At the end of the nineteenth century, commercialized images of Loïe Fuller abounded in
> Paris. There were Loïe Fuller skirts, handkerchiefs, lamps, small sculptures, and
> figurines. During the 1900 Paris exposition, Fuller was considered the height of fashion
and, in addition to having a theater of her own, was celebrated in a plaster statue situated on top of the Palais de Danse. (88)

While Fuller is not recognized in contemporary dance history as an important figure it is evident that in turn-of-the-century Paris, she was regarded as the *Danseuse de la belle époque* (Albright 98).

How does a renowned dancer like Fuller lose her significance in the narrative of modern dance? Where does this disconnect happen? Albright suggests that perhaps this divide transpires because of the emphasis placed on the conceptual nature of Fuller’s work as opposed to the physical nature (39). Albright states, “Losing the materiality of her body, she became the embodiment of an idea” (39). Albright ponders that perhaps the physicality of Fuller’s movement was lost in the midst of the swirl of her absence and presence and the images her dances evoked. She notes that writers and critics of the era tended to focus on the visual representations Fuller created as opposed to the physicality she employed in her performances (Albright 39). Albright asserts, “Although this [focus on] intellectual abstraction has given us some of the most interesting writing on Fuller, it has also left us a legacy of ignoring Fuller’s corporeality” (39). While I agree with Albright that perhaps the focus on abstraction has caused writers to focus more on the visual images her performances convey, I do not believe that this is the only explanation. I think that Fuller’s inability to articulate the physicality of her movement contributes to her exclusion from modern dance.

Fuller did not possess the vocabulary to express her physical movement. As discussed in Chapter Three, when describing her Serpentine Dance Fuller claims, “It is very difficult . . . to describe this part of my dance. You have to see it and feel it. It is too complicated for realisation
in words” (34). Fuller cannot communicate the physical movement of her body in the Serpentine Dance. However, as also noted in Chapter Three, it does seem that Fuller is aware that in her movement, she is doing something new because she differentiates herself from other skirt dancers who she claims are only “twirling muslin” and “bobbing in and out of the limelight” (Albright 39).

I think that perhaps Fuller was not credited as modern dancer at least in part because she could not communicate her method of movement. Therefore because her technique was not documented, it was perhaps assumed that she did not have one. Because she did not articulate or document a method of movement, emphasis was placed on her lighting and theatrical techniques. However, as I note in Chapter Three, Albright’s remounting of Fuller’s Serpentine Dance, brings attention back to the physical movement of Fuller’s body. The remounting demonstrates that in order to lift her wands of fabric and move in space, Fuller had to employ a very specific technique that incorporated torque and the use of her torso.

Fuller not only exhibited modern ideas in her methods of movement, she also demonstrated them in her theories regarding space and inner life. She believed that theatrical space could be used to represent internal spirit and emotion. Examining her ideas in context of the Symbolists reveals that they both possessed a desire to use lighting and other theatrical techniques to evoke representations of inner emotion and spirit onstage. Fuller’s Serpentine Dance employed color, light, fabric, and movement in a synesthetic way that elicited Symbolist ideals of abstraction, otherworldly images, and an abdication of linear time. Examining Fuller through a Symbolist lens reveals that Fuller’s theories regarding space were modern in nature because she used the stage space as a place to express her internal impulses.
Fuller was not only compelled to stage her interior desires, but she wanted to make those internal ideas visible in her dance. Exploring Fuller’s ideas concerning internal emotion through the lens of Delsarte’s acting method helps to elucidate how Fuller strove to embody expression in her movement. Fuller did not want to create dance that was merely formalized steps pieced together. She wanted to create movement that was the physical embodiment of an internal impulse and she strove to communicate her inner ideas to the audience through her physical movement. Once again, through her ambition to create dance that was not merely exterior, but instead emerged from the inside out, she demonstrates concepts that are associated with modern dance.

While Fuller did discuss her theories regarding space and inner impulse in her writing, she did not communicate how she physically moved her body. As noted earlier, she did not have the vocabulary to do so. However, by analyzing Fuller’s movement through the lens of Laban’s techniques we are able to use his vocabulary to discuss Fuller’s physicality. Examining Fuller’s movement within the context of Laban’s theories reveals that she was indeed using modern movement in her dances. She employed her torso in her dance and engaged with her kinesphere and with the use of her wands outside her kinesphere. Laban’s terminology allows us to view Fuller’s performance and comprehend that not only was she exhibiting modern techniques regarding space and inner life, but physically, she was also moving her body in a modern way.

Modern dance is a movement composed of individuals incorporating similar ideas but each executing them in their own way. Fuller is one of those individuals. She rejected formalized embodiment and created dances based on inner concepts. She employed both innovative movement and technology in her performances. Her fusion of space, body, inner life, color, light,
and fabric in her performances created an amalgamation that was uniquely Fuller and ultimately an expression of modern movement.
WORKS CITED


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