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AMERICANIZED DELSARTE CULTURE
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HOW AMERICAN WOMEN SHAPED
FRANCOIS DELSARTE'S SYSTEM OF APPLIED AESTHETICS
INTO A PROGRESSIVE FORCE
FOR SOCIAL REFORM, PERFORMANCE, AND PROFESSIONALISM

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Joseph Francis Fahey, M.A.

The Ohio State University
2000

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ABSTRACT

Americanized Delsarte Culture applied the tenets of Francois Delsarte’s System of Applied Aesthetics to all aspects of American life. No other society appropriated Delsarte’s system in this way, and the causes for this uniquely American phenomenon can be traced to the turmoil of a rapidly changing American culture in the late nineteenth century. As Americans struggled to find order in a society that was experiencing profound shifts - including monopolization, incorporation, urbanization, and mass immigration - many sought comfort in totalizing belief systems that could adjust to a world in flux. In its American adaptations Delsartism was both totalizing and completely malleable, adjusting to the uncertainties of late nineteenth century American culture. It was used to defend American civilization and to criticize it, drew on an artistic tradition from antiquity, yet professed its modernism, and became a tool for pragmatic professionalism in physical training, yet did so in the flowery language of sentimentalism. Ironically, the same aspects of Delsartism criticized by most historians - its fluidity and malleability - were keys to its widespread popularity.

Another reason for this popularity was its usefulness as a vehicle for women who sought greater expressive possibilities in Victorian culture. Delsartism allowed middle
and upper class women to seek greater freedom and control of their own bodies while remaining within the realm of polite society. With a culture in flux and a motivated population of women teachers and advocates, Delsartism had a niche to fill in American culture and a discipleship to spread its Americanized gospel of social reform and liberation through physical awareness. Although Delsartian reformers were limited by the restrictive patriarchy of Victorian society, they found numerous ways to win partial victories for American women, and they laid foundations for the suffrage movement and feminist movement of the twentieth century.

By considering three spheres of influence most affected by the Delsartians' efforts — social reform, performance, and professionalism — historians begin to recuperate the largely-ignored efforts of these women, and they are more likely to make sense of a phenomenon that continues to resist most scholars' interpretations of the course of American theatre.
Dedicated to my wife, my son, my loving family
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I extend my greatest appreciation to Dr. Thomas Postelwait. His dedication to his students and to his profession are evident in all that he does. I am grateful for his generosity, his humility, his intellectual tenacity, and his buoyant sense of humor.
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INTRODUCTION

Conventionality has much to answer for in the subjugation of women to false standards. Society has said . . . that culture consist of repression, not expression; that it admit of no enthusiasm, no spontaneity, no show of feeling; these are “bad form” not to say “vulgar.” Conformity to such standards robs people of individuality and naturalness. It dwarfs the mind, checks the sympathies, restricts the physical resources, and narrows the life.

-Emily Bishop, Americanized Delsarte Culture (1892), 182.

If conference proceedings and the agenda of professional organizations are any indication of the priorities of a particular field, then American theatre training, especially training centered in academic institutions, has devoted great attention to the physical body as of late. For example, of the five workshops promoted by Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) at its 2000 conference, two were focused specifically on new ways to explore movement for the actor. One of these workshops offered an examination of the “Viewpoints” training developed by Mary Overlie at New York University in the 1980s and subsequently employed by Anne Bogart and the Saratoga International Theatre Institute in residencies and touring productions throughout the United States. This “viscerally dynamic
theory of movement" (2000 ATHE Brochure 5) has been the subject of numerous articles, reviews, and interviews, and has established a place for Bogart as one of the premiere directors in America. Another ATHE workshop, entitled "Sampling Suzuki," provided participants the opportunity to explore a training method that "strives to restore wholeness of body as a tool of theatre expression" (2000 ATHE Brochure 5). This act of restoration suggests that the body was somehow lost in modern actor training. Indeed, American actor training in the last three decades has been increasingly focused on exploring the physical aspects of theatrical expression. Those who wish to infuse into acting curricula a wide range of physically-intense training philosophies can draw from many sources, including Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, Eastern movement forms, and even the teaching methods Constantine Stanislavski employed later in his career. The influence of these artists, as well as their American counterparts in The Living Theatre, The Open Theatre and similar institutions, was abetted by the development of modern dance in the mid-twentieth century. The integration of dance training into acting curricula, including classical ballet, contact improvisation, and the modern techniques of Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey, attests to a widespread effort to rediscover the body of the actor as an expressive tool. The many physically-based acting systems, sound or suspect, that are promoted at workshops across the country also suggest a massive effort to rediscover the primacy of movement in the actor's craft.

Richard Hornby, in The End of Acting: A Radical View (1991), attributes the loss of a dynamic physical life in American actors to Lee Strasberg. By interpreting Stanislavski's theories as narrowly as he did, focusing almost exclusively on affective memory and the
psychological investigations of the actor, Strasberg encouraged a generation of actors to pay little attention to their physical body:

Before the twentieth century, dualists in acting theory tended to identify emotion with the actor's body; reason was inside, emotions outside. . . . Strasberg, on the other hand, associated emotion with the actor's mind; emotions were now inside, while the outside, the body, was associated with "externals" like speech, movement, and technical polish generally. (111) (author's emphasis)

Hornby probably attributes too much influence to this one man, as have others who have seen Strasberg as either villain or saint of the American theatre. Nevertheless, Strasberg and "the method" represent a uniquely American phenomenon, and a vision of the actor that departed greatly from another vibrant American training model that placed the actor's physicality at the center of his or her emotional life.

Four decades before Strasberg came into contact with the Moscow Art Theatre and a century before the current fascination with the physical life of the actor, a large population of American women embraced a system of physical training and emotional display that appeared in the classrooms of the American Academy of Dramatic Art, the stages of New York, and commercial studios and private venues throughout the country. It led to the establishment of societies of physical culture, trade journals, and instructional techniques devoted to promoting the aesthetic system of Francois Delsarte.

American Delsartism was frequently ridiculed in its own day and has been the subject of mostly unfavorable criticism by theatre scholars in the decades since, but from the 1870s through the early years of the twentieth century, it was - in multiple variations and adaptations
by far the most popular and influential American training system for actors, elocutionists, and people who were interested in aesthetics and deportment from all walks of life. As a cultural phenomenon, American Delsartism served as a means for middle class women to assert an sense of self-control, self-possession, and liberation unusual for the Victorian era. Delsartians challenged corsets, paternalistic medical prejudice, and limitations imposed upon a woman’s sphere of influence in the great affairs and daily commerce of the nation. They formed alliances with temperance unions and women’s aid societies. Delsartism also allowed for numerous professional opportunities and means of association in a Victorian society with few outlets for the independent or career-minded woman.

Modern theatre historians have been reluctant to examine this physical training system as a system of culture. Yet, if we are to understand the true nature of American Delsartism and its potential legacy in American actor training, we must recognize its far-reaching cultural significance. It makes little sense to find statements like Emily Bishop’s attack on conventionality in a Delsartian instructional manual unless we acknowledge that Delsartism was used by its adherents not simply to reform the training of actors, but also to reform American culture. The challenge for historians in understanding the American applications of Francois Delsarte’s System of Applied Aesthetics is the sense of fluidity that pervades these applications. American Delsartism relied on fluidity in every aspect of its philosophy and application. It resided in the margins between clearly-defined professions and belief systems. The typical reaction of theatre scholars has been to consider it a faddish phenomenon of little significance. Yet the fluidity that causes scholars to look past this movement is the secret to the movement’s rapid rise and far-reaching popularity. Delsartism blurred the lines between
professional and amateur, domestic and civic, aesthetic and practical, pragmatic and sentimental, ephemera and substance, science and faith, and theatre and culture. By doing so it offered a wide array of targets for those who ridiculed the system. By cloaking themselves in the all-encompassing mantle of Delsarte "culture," American Delsartians reflected a time of fluidity and turmoil, when old ways of thinking were giving way to new and often unsettling realities. Reading Bishop's political statement in a health and exercise book can only make sense when viewed in this broader context. A careful examination of the writings of the most articulate Delsartians reveals that the dichotomies that trouble historians have usually been fashioned by the historians themselves, often in disregard of the interwoven threads of culture that make up a period as complex and tumultuous at the late nineteenth century. By coming to a better understanding of American Delsartism as a fluid cultural phenomenon, we dispel the rigid binaries of body or mind, and aesthetic or pragmatic that hampered so much of twentieth century thought about the actor, her training, and her place in society.

If we evaluate American Delsartism only for its direct impact upon American actor training of the twentieth century, then we are likely to find few contributions that can be immediately attributed to this movement. The system certainly fell far short of its purported promise, a promise that once seemed substantial. One commentator in 1891 argued that the legacy of Genevieve Stebbins, the foremost female Delsartian in the United States, would one day be celebrated not just by artists, but by all people devoted to the "science of life;"

To estimate offhand the influence of Mrs. Stebbins's work is impossible. It spreads out in all directions. . . . If a science of life be ever evolved, her work will have played an important part in its formation. (Wilbor 486)
Yet, despite Elsie Wilbor's proclamation of the "Age of Stebbins," rarely today is Stebbins' name invoked, even in theatre circles. Her relevance and the relevance of the theatre system she advocated faded by the 1920s.

I contend, however, that Stebbins' influence and that of her American colleagues did not disappear entirely. American Delsartism, a movement dominated by women, achieved partial victories within the restrictive sphere of Victorian patriarchy. Many Delsartians advocated the rights of women, the virtues of culture, and the power of professionalism. Their protest - often veiled, but sometimes quite contentious - against the restrictive conventions of Victorian fashion paved the way for the more iconoclastic voices of Isadora Duncan and Margaret Sanger just a few years later. The tumult of their times, and their need to conform to the appearance of propriety in Victorian society, led the Delsartians to write in contradictory and excessively sentimental ways. Yet, if we place them in their historical context and look beneath the sentimental rhetoric of their prose, then a progressive vision for society and the theatre begins to emerge from their texts.

By considering a cross section of the most significant instructional manuals authored by the leading American Delsartians, I hope to demonstrate that this movement served a much wider range of interests than most historians acknowledge. I will also identify the influence of a number of contradictory cultural forces on the writing and reception of these texts. Ultimately, I argue that, despite the limitations placed upon them and the largely conservative middle class nature of their movement, the American Delsartians were a progressive force for women and for theatre training in late nineteenth century America. I have chosen to investigate 1) their contributions to social reform, especially as this reform
related to the Victorian image of women, 2) the relationship between Delsartian performance, particularly statue posing, and the Victorian woman's identity, and 3) the forms of professionalization Delsartism offered American women and American actor training.

In Chapter One: "American Delsartians and Their Contexts," I draw upon the work of scholars in cultural history, women's studies, and theatre in order to demonstrate that the women who advocated Delsartism in America have been largely ignored or misunderstood. I argue that many scholars have been unable to address adequately the work of these women because they have failed to situate American Delsartism in its broader social and political context. To counter that oversight, I place several of the key texts from the best known American Delsartians within the context of a late nineteenth century American society in crisis. Within this context, the contributions of this movement to early American feminism, Victorian performance, and an emerging American professionalism in theatre, can be more carefully assessed.

I will argue in Chapter Two, "Delsartians as Social Reformers," that the interests of these Delsartians were political and social in nature, and that the activities of these women were closely tied with the emergence of a "club feminism" in the late 1800s. Delsartians' efforts at social reform were shaped by a combination of pragmatism and sentimentalism and relied on the basic tenet of Delsarte's System of Applied Aesthetics that actions of the body correspond to the functions of the mind and the power of the spirit. This trinity formed Delsarte's Law of Correspondence, and when his followers in America applied it to the workings of society it became a justification for outspoken calls for reforms in many areas, including education, morality, and fashion. Reform-minded Delsartians also found social
power through an aesthetic regimen by forming communities that intermingled artistic, social, and political agendas. Considering all of these factors as well as the limitations imposed upon women's activism in the 1890s, I conclude that, despite contradictory forces within the culture and the movement, Delsartism was a progressive force for women's liberation in nineteenth century America.

In Chapter Three, "Delsartians as Impersonal Creations," I maintain that the performance modes of American Delsartism, especially statue posing, advanced images of women's identity that gained power through the depersonalized representation of woman. Through this model of performance Delsartian performers found a means of forceful expression rooted in an ideal image — of Athena or "wisdom" or some other static, immutable manifestation of "the beautiful" — drawn from nature or antiquity and filtered through Delsarte's System of Applied Aesthetics. To this image these women added the subversive potential of a performing body that remained transient, unknowable, and fluid. I conclude that one contradiction haunted this potentially liberating performative context: as the stage creation gained freedom from Victorian strictures, the performed image of woman was locked into the ephemeral realm of incorporeal statue, nymph, or "beauty." With this limitation inherent in Delsartian performance, socially-conscious advocates of the system had to look to other measures of progress for women's identity, such as an emerging identity of the woman as professional.

In Chapter Four, "Delsartians as Professionals," I focus on the ways in which many Delsartians found their most tangible liberation not in the performed image of Victorian woman, but rather in their efforts to build a professionalism into their network of teachers and
artists. In the midst of this effort these Delsartians faced the contradiction that, just as they were striving toward the stature of the “professional,” the model of the professional was changing from authority figure to bureaucratic worker. Despite this limitation, we can see a professional orientation masked by the sentimental prose of the most significant Delsartian texts. We can also see professionalism linked to American Delsartism in the emerging theatre school movement of the late nineteenth century. The nature of the professionalism that emerges from the work of Delsartian instructors, lacking as they did clear standards for their profession and unable to gain access to the traditional means of professional identity, can be difficult to assess. In general, the Delsartians’ instructional texts suggest that it is a professionalism that is defensive in nature, and that unites a search for higher standards with self-promotional status-seeking. I argue that this facet of American Delsartism can be seen as a product of an emerging professionalization of American actor training and a form of competitive entrepreneurship unusual for Victorian women. Ultimately, the professional orientation of these texts reveals an assertive voice from Delsartian women at odds with the picture that is painted of them by lampoonists and critical scholars.

In a brief conclusion to this study, I hope to invite a rethinking of the place of American Delsartism in our writing of theatre history. Despite the contradictions that exist within both the original philosophy and the various strains of the movement, Delsartism reveals a surprising number of progressive ideas regarding actor training. Many of these ideas were widely applied to actor training in America through the influence of Delsartism on modern dance. Delsartian principles found direct application to actor training only after the growth of university theatre training programs and the integration of physical theatre training
in acting styles and programs from the 1960s forward. If scholars can reconsider these texts of a century ago as cultural manifestos as well as movement manuals, and weigh them in a manner that accommodates the ambiguities, the contradictions, and the tumult of the times in which they were created, there is an opportunity to recuperate the insights these professionals and reformers offered the theatre and the society of their time. Such a recuperation benefits our understanding of theatre history, social history, and the current practice of actor training in America.

ENDNOTES

1. Wilbor's testimonial appears in the addendum to Genevieve Stebbins' *The Delsarte System of Expression*, 6th ed. (1902). This work was Genevieve Stebbins' seminal text. As such, it frequently appears in this study. To distinguish it from other texts with similar titles and to simplify parenthetical citations, this text will subsequently be referred to as *DSOE* in citations.
CHAPTER 1

AMERICAN DELSARTIANS AND THEIR CONTEXTS

Understanding the simultaneous promise and failure of American Delsartism requires that we make sense of Delsarte and his popularity in America. In this chapter I first provide a broad outline of American Delsartism. Second, I present the cultural models I have used to frame this investigation. Of particular significance is the overriding tension between stasis and fluidity. While a static ideal of "beauty" (or "truth") shaped Delsartian philosophy, its American adaptations were notable for fluid applications of Delsartism that merged competing orientations such as science and faith, tradition and modernity, and the practical and the aesthetic. Third, I highlight the contributions of several key scholars in women's studies to this work. Fourth, I provide a brief description of the five Delsartian instructional texts at the core of this investigation. Fifth, I lay out a brief overview of the recent scholarship on Delsarte and his adherents in America. Once these foundations are in place, in the remaining chapters we can turn our attention to the issues of social reform, performance, and professionalism at the heart of this study.

1.1 A Broad Outline of American Delsartism

The contributions of Francois Delsarte (1811-1871), a French teacher of singing and
acting, and the efforts of his American disciples, have remained the subject of confusion for most of the twentieth century. When most theatre historians and practitioners think of Delsarte's System of Applied Aesthetics, they think of a set of codified gestures and expressions used in melodramatic acting. Much of this assessment is due to the power of images over words. Pictorial representations of Delsarte's system (Figure 1.1) frequently take the place of the more subtle and complex aspects of his writings. Delsarte attempted to set forth a holistic physical, mental, and spiritual approach to understanding the human body. His Law of Correspondence, for example, in which he asserted that "To each spiritual function responds a function of the body" (DSOE 67), is a dictum that has found application in the teachings of Meyerhold, Grotowski, and Laban. After Delsarte's death in 1871 Steele MacKaye, a celebrated student of Delsarte in Paris, advocated his teachings in the United States, primarily through a series of lecture-demonstrations. However, the widest application of Delsartism in America was to be found not in MacKaye's lecture circuit or even in his professional theatre school. Instead, the most frequently heard voices of Delsartism came from the thousands of disciples who took up the system in private studios, small schools of actor training, society gatherings, amateur recitals, and a professional performance circuit for statue posing.

In Reformers and Visionaries, dance historian Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter lays out three distinct phases of American Delsartism: 1) the 1870's in which the system was most frequently used by speakers and actors; 2) the 1880s, in which its value as an expression of physical culture, especially for women, was dominant; and 3) the late 1880s and beyond, a period in which its adherents sought applications to all social and moral aspects of life (18).
Genevieve Stebbins gives quite a different chart, and in her chart all the excentric attitudes have the weight borne on the front foot—attitudes of attack, positive and outgoing (extroverts), the normal attitudes have the weight equally on both feet, and the concentric attitudes have the weight on the back foot, as being defensive, weak, passive, introvert, negative or retreating.

Figure 1.1. Delsarte Attitudes as Reproduced by Ted Shawn.
This expanded version of Delsartism was referred to as “psycho-physical culture” by many of Delsarte’s American adapters. The pioneering work of Steele MacKaye belongs squarely in the first of these three phases. This work includes his initial lecture-demonstration circuit in the early 1870s, and it includes MacKaye’s efforts to start a professional acting school. These efforts eventually led to the founding of the American Academy of Dramatic Art.

MacKaye’s contributions to this first phase, as well as the contributions of Franklin Sargent, Samuel Silas Curry, and a core group of leaders in acting and elocution, are profiled in James McTeague’s *Before Stanislavski: American Professional Acting Schools and Acting Theory 1875-1925* (1993) and in several essays from *A History of Speech Education in America* (1954). These essays include Claude L. Shaver’s “Steele MacKaye and the Delsartian Tradition,” and Francis Hodge’s “The Private Theatre Schools of the Late Nineteenth Century.” Steele MacKaye’s contributions to Delsartism and the efforts of his associates have been exhaustively presented in Percy MacKaye’s two volume biography of his father, *Epoch*, and in a number of unpublished theses and dissertations. By contrast, the second and third phases have been little-explored, and consist mostly of the efforts the women advocates of American Delsartism. These phases serve as the primary focus of Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

The chronological development implied by Ruyter’s phases is misleading because aspects of these three Delsartian spheres of activity occurred throughout the period from the 1870s through the 1890s. For example, as early as 1871 Steele MacKaye referred to the social and moral benefits of Delsartism in his effort to found a school that would build “character, morality, aesthetics, and religion” (qtd. in *Epoch* 1, 159), and Delsarte’s system was embraced by prominent religious leaders as a means to improve their own eloquence and
to advance the moral reform of their congregations. Likewise, Eleanor Georgen’s 1893 text *The Delsarte System of Expression* was as much a treatise on acting theory and technique as it was an examination of psycho-physical culture. Nevertheless, Ruyter’s three-phase division is useful when evaluating the primary focus of each Delsartian’s instructional text. By this measure each of the Delsartians featured in this study shared the priorities of the Second and Third phases in Ruyter’s model. The work of Genevieve Stebbins, the most prominent of these Second stage and Third stage Delsartians, reveals the breadth of inquiry and the continually expanding scope of activity of these women.

Stebbins was the most prodigious student of Steele MacKaye in the 1870s. From the late 1870s through the 1890s she taught, wrote, and performed extensively. Stebbins’ dynamic career is evident from her own writings, the praise and derision she received from her contemporaries, and the many references to her in *Werner’s Magazine*, the mouthpiece for American Delsartism from the 1870s through the 1890s. She promoted her cause and herself in a time when few women could stand as professionals at the pinnacle of their field, especially a field that included men as well as women. As an advocate for her own style of Delsartism, she was lauded by Wilbor, MacKaye, and many other Delsartians as the most influential of the American teachers of Delsarte. Her articles and reviews of her books appear frequently in *Werner’s*, and pioneers of modern dance such as Ruth St. Denis and Isadora Duncan wrote about Stebbins’ influence on their work (Jowitt 128). She often acted like a revolutionary within the Delsarte system, free to assess the limitations of the system and its originator: “Like all other human beings, Delsarte was liable to err, and often made serious mistakes” (*DSOE* 393). Such statements make her sound much less like a disciple and more
like a fiercely independent contributor to the movement. This independence is illustrated in additional critiques of Delsarte and her teacher MacKaye. She felt confident that she had a complete understanding of the system:

To me it matters very little what Delsarte himself may or may not have taught any particular pupil . . . a broad outline of Delsarte’s formulations . . . is all we want, for Delsarte was not superior to his temperament and environment any more than the rest of the race are to their temperament and environment. (399)

She also made it quite clear that in America she carried the torch that MacKaye supposedly dropped. In this vein she judges the lack of a definitive Delsarte text from MacKaye to be of little consequence:

The work referred to is another of Mr. MacKaye’s unrealized ideals; but, fortunately, this is no loss, as all the valuable matter entrusted to him is embodied in *The Delsarte System of Expression*. (382 fn)

She did not reserve her forceful opinions for her colleagues alone; she also dismissed the most prestigious critics of the system:

Some say that the greatest masters of histrionic art sneer at the method. Who are the greatest masters who so sneer? I studied under [Francois Joseph] Regnier in Paris, and I know his opinion; but he never had time or patience to study it. Consequently he did not know in what its value consisted. (439)

Ultimately, she echoes Wilbor’s statement about her own influence, suggesting that her vision of Delsartism was *the* vision for the future: “The physical culture of the future - and this future is not very remote - will be along the lines I have indicated” (406). Much of this
confidence is supported by her extensive contributions to her field. In addition to her many published works, her performance and teaching skills appear to have been widely respected. As will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 3, she developed the medium of statue posing, articulating an exacting set of standards for "artistic statue posing." Consequently, Ruyter argues that Stebbins, the first to feature non-verbal expression in Delsartian public performance, was the pioneer of this art form ("Antique Longings" 72). In statue posing and a wide variety of activities Stebbins and her fellow disciples, the overwhelming majority of whom were women, shaped the system to serve their own purposes. Their work, described by many as a "distortion" or "perversion" of the original system, has yet to receive the serious attention of theatre scholars.

A number of contradictions have plagued theatre scholars' efforts to find a place for Delsarte and his American followers. In her 1967 study of the influence of Delsarte in America, Patsy Ann Clark Hecht argued that "Delsarte's primary objective is to provide a scientific basis for the actor's art, a set of tools which he can utilize when inspiration fails" (Hecht 265). But as Claude Shaver and others have pointed out, Delsarte's "science" was fundamentally flawed, compromised by his rigid adherence to Catholic doctrine and a Trinitarian division within all natural phenomena (Shaver, "Steele MacKaye" 204). Yet despite his dependence on this religious model, Delsarte employed empirical evidence, observing human behavior in a wide variety of settings, and he searched for a system that could be verified by observation. If we focus only on the suspect "science" behind Delsartism, we miss the opportunity to study American Delsartism as an aesthetic, political, and cultural phenomenon. By situating American Delsartism within the cultural
contradictions of the late nineteenth century, we are more likely to understand the Delsartians in their own context and to assess their contributions to American actor training and American society.

Delsarte’s disciples in America readily acknowledged the application of his regimen in the arts beyond theatre. Later scholars have argued that Delsarte as well saw applications for his theories beyond the theatre: "the goals of his training system . . . reach far beyond theatre. Delsarte contends that his system is applicable to all art forms -- not only the performing arts, but the graphic arts as well" (Hecht 267). But in the hands of his American disciples, the System of Applied Aesthetics became the basis for not just the arts but every aspect of culture. One such disciple, Emily Bishop, was typical in her eagerness to fashion her Delsarte work and that of her colleagues into an expression of a uniquely American culture:

The first instinct of the American mind is to make practical and to popularize whatever seems good and true. By Americanized Delsarte Culture, then, is meant the Delsarte art of expression, so broadened, as to be of general benefit to all persons, instead of being only of special benefit to one class - artists (Self Expression and Health: Americanized Delsarte Culture, 199-200).

This democratic search for a broader application led to a modified system, social and political in nature, which represented a culture largely of, by, and for women.

To untie the knot that binds this culture and the theories of Delsarte, I will examine five major texts by the American Delsartians within the context provided by the major histories of the period, commentaries from the era, and theatre scholarship in the evolving
training of the actor. In these Delsartians’ texts the cultural historian can find the empowered voice of a group of women who took advantage of a temporary void of authority in late nineteenth century American society, held the stage briefly, then yielded to competing forces in American culture and its theatre. If Wilbor’s statement (and those of so many of her contemporaries) about Stebbins’ inestimable and lasting influence was so far off the mark, then what were the factors that led to her assuredness in making this claim, and what were the factors that seemed to relegate Stebbins and her kind to virtual irrelevance by the 1920s?

In order to understand the Delsartian movement we need to place it within the larger social and political contexts of the era. Drawing upon the work of such cultural historians as Robert Wiebe, Alan Trachtenberg, and Miles Orvell, I want to show the contradictory nature of the American Delsartians’ simultaneous promise and demise. Only when we consider these Delsartian texts as products of multiple contradictions within the culture (a phenomenon Robert Wiebe has identified as the battle between order and disorder and Miles Orvell has framed as the contest between imitation and authenticity), do we begin to appreciate their significance as sites of complex cultural interaction. For example, the Delsartians’ efforts at social reform are circumscribed by Victorian sentimentalism, but that sentimentalism — at least in shaping the feminine domain of motherhood — serves as a source of power for these women. Their performances as Delsartians entailed depictions of statues, but the performers were applauded for their transience. They attempted to forge a professional identity, including restrictive Delsarte associations and a competitive entrepreneurship between studios, at a time when the old model of professionalism was giving way to the muddled professional identity of the bureaucratic orientation. Each of these characteristics of
Delsartism cannot be understood without accounting for the cultural context of the system's Americanization.

1.2 Cultural Models

If we examine the writings of the leading American Delsartian, Genevieve Stebbins, we see many of the same arguments that fueled the innovations of Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, and Ted Shawn. These three individuals are considered significant pioneers in the move toward a "modern" sensibility in performance, and they acknowledged the influence of Stebbins in their work, including their devotion to all things Greek. A number of Shawn's students later wrote about this influence in their training, and attributed Martha Graham's technique of contraction and release to "the Delsartean inspiration... she had learned from Shawn" (Sherman 87). Furthermore, Shawn repeatedly positioned himself as an advocate of Delsarte in relation to Stebbins' authority on the subject. This can be found throughout his writings, and is illustrated by the final paragraph in Figure 1.1, one of many such examples within Shawn's Every Little Movement.

Stebbins also articulated many of the same values as pioneers in the Art Theatre Movement, most notably Maurice Browne of the Chicago Little Theatre and Jig Cook of the Provincetown Players. These values included a celebration of community as the basis for art and a valorization of Greek culture as the basis for enhanced American forms of expression. Cook has been described by his biographer as someone who "had a love for everything Greek and dreamed of a Platonic community" (Sarlos 9), and his efforts with the Provincetown players summarized as a "search for a new Athens that would enrich America as a new source for human accomplishment" (44). So how is it that Cook, Duncan, and their kind have found
a respectable place in our histories of American theatre, dance, and culture, while the
Delsartian women of the late nineteenth century are dismissed, ignored, or lampooned by not
only scholars and critics, but in popular caricatures ranging from The Seldarte Craze to The
Music Man? The answer, at least in part, lies with the convoluted times which these
American Delsartians inhabited. The turmoil of the late nineteenth century created an
opportunity for the voice of these women to be heard, but also signaled a change that swept
them aside by the first decades of the twentieth century. To appreciate this phenomenon and
to begin to come to terms with the contradictions they represented, we must consider the
culture from which they emerged.

In his landmark study of the period, The Search for Order, 1877-1920, Robert Wiebe
voiced the frustration of many historians who have tried to make sense of the contradictory
forces at work in American society in the late nineteenth century:

An age never lent itself more readily to sweeping, uniform description:
nationalization, industrialization, mechanization, urbanization. Yet to almost all of
the people who created them, these themes meant only dislocation and bewilderment.
America in the late nineteenth century was a society without a core. It lacked those
national centers of authority and information which might have given order to such
swift changes. (12)

The void created by this lack of order allowed women in the American Delsartian movement
to assume positions for equal education and other reforms, advocating for causes beyond the
realm of artistic training. The forces that led to a new accommodation with modern life by
the end of the century also contributed to the decline of the movement and its seeming lack of
relevance to what came after. During the years of its greatest influence American Delsartism embodied many of the contradictions that shaped American culture and society in the late nineteenth century. Consideration of just a few of the major histories of the period demonstrates the many contradictory forces that shaped this society, and, in turn, shaped American Delsartism.

In *The Search for Order*, Wiebe focuses on the dislocation associated with the passing of the “island community,” a community best represented by the small town. This community was built upon personal relationships, lifelong reputations, and an informal but powerful network of connections. By the 1890s it gave way to a political, social, and economic system whose bases of power were distant and impersonal. The monopolies in industry, the railroad, and the government created what Wiebe describes as a “distended” society:

> As the network of relations affecting men’s lives became more tangled and more distended, Americans in a basic sense no longer knew who or where they were . . .
>
> For lack of anything that made better sense of their world, people everywhere weighed, counted, and measured it.

In much the same way, American Delsartians frequently offered a quantity of rules, drills, and variations of expression almost as a substitute for a succinct philosophy that made sense of their program. Wiebe argues that the distended society allowed idealism to give way to bureaucratic thought, a philosophical orientation dependent upon constant management of the members of society, reliant on the new professional, and subject to change in accordance with a society in flux. Wiebe argues that bureaucratic ideals were
particularly suited to the fluidity and impersonality of an urban-industrial world. They pictured a society of ceaselessly interacting members and concentrated upon adjustments within it. Although they included rules and principles of human behavior, these necessarily had an indeterminate quality because perpetual interaction was itself indeterminate. No matter how clear the evidence of the present, a society in flux always contained that irreducible element of contingency, and predictability really means probability. Thus the rules, resembling orientations much more than laws, stressed techniques of constant watchfulness and mechanisms of continuous management. (145)

Wiebe's assessment helps to explain the diffusion of American Delsartism into multiple versions and the penchant toward commercialism in some corners of the Delsartian community, and the influence of the bureaucratic orientation can be found in the social reform efforts, performance aesthetic, and professionalism of American Delsartism.

As Wiebe examines a late nineteenth century American society in crisis he argues that Americans experienced fundamental shifts in thinking in the late nineteenth century toward two orientations. One was toward spiritualism, which drew the largest number of worried Americans (63). The other was toward the bureaucratic orientation. Wiebe argues that bureaucratic thought made "science" practically synonymous with "scientific method." Science had become a procedure or an orientation rather than a body of results. (147)

The appeal of the many "laws" of Delsartism, and the successive divisions of gestures and components of the body by three and nines can be seen as key aspects of this appearance of
science. Such an appearance lent weight to Delsartism in late nineteenth century America. Wiebe argues that this bureaucratic orientation can be found in all aspects of late nineteenth century culture, including political reform movements, civic reform, social work, law, the new social sciences, and new ways of perceiving history (149). The flexibility of looking scientific rather than subjecting one's belief system to the actual rigors of scientific thought allowed Delsartism to accommodate both science and religion and it allowed Delsartism to define itself as compatible to most other movements and reforms in American culture. As such, the bureaucratic orientation provided Delsartians in America an opportunity to simultaneously keep their conservative faith and chart a largely secular course of moral and social reform.

What Wiebe calls the "distended society" and the "bureaucratic orientation," Alan Trachtenberg, building upon the work of Wiebe and Leo Marx, identified as an "incorporated" society in his 1982 study The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age. In laying out his argument, Trachtenberg points to societal frustrations within this period similar to those that Wiebe described:

The argument that I develop is that economic incorporation wrenched American society from the moorings of familiar values, that the process proceeded by contradiction and conflict. The corporate system in business, politics, and cultural institutions engendered opposing views, however inchoate and incomplete that opposition remained. The deepest changes in these decades of swift and thorough industrialization and urbanization lay at the level of culture, difficult for contemporaries to recognize, and baffling for historians.(7)
Trachtenberg's discussion of the contradictory and magnified image of the machine appears particularly useful for an examination of American Delsartism, a movement that often had to defend itself from charges of being "mechanical." Furthermore, through his consideration of cultural events like the Chautauqua circuit and the Chicago Exposition, Trachtenberg provides valuable insights into the relationship between political, social, and cultural forces in these years of turmoil, concluding his study with the White City's "insubstantiality." The temporary, illusory nature of the buildings, and "the ephemerality of the show, made the White City all the more ideal: the momentary realization of a dream" (230). In much the same way Delsartians, posing as fictionalized, idealized, spectral beings, offered a similar illusory depiction of beauty. At the same time these Delsartians praised the mechanical beauty and simplicity of the corporeal body, often promoting physical training as a practical solution to many worldly ills.

Whereas Wiebe focuses upon distension and the emergence of bureaucratic thought, and Trachtenberg takes up the issue of incorporation, Miles Orvell, his 1989 study *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940,* presents America in the same period as a battleground between imitation and authenticity:

a major shift occurred within the arts and material culture from the late nineteenth century to the twentieth century . . . the nineteenth-century culture of imitations was fascinated by reproductions of all sorts - replicas of furniture, architecture, art works, replicas of the real thing in any shape or form imaginable. It was a culture inspired by faith in the power of the machine to manufacture a credible simulacrum; yet it had not fully absorbed the methods of the machine, and in the end it was a culture of types, of
stylizations, of rounded generalities. The culture of authenticity that developed at the end of the century and that gradually established the aesthetic vocabulary that we have called "modernist" was a reaction against the earlier aesthetic, an effort to get beyond mere imitation, beyond the manufacturing of illusions, to the creation of more "authentic" works that were themselves real things" (xv).

Orvell finds examples of this cultural shift in an enormous range of technological instruments and literary movements of the age, from the camera — a device that "was arguably influencing the character of American culture as much as any other single technology" (73) and was becoming "part and parcel of the middle class culture that accepted replications of every sort" (75) — trends in advertising to furniture styles and the decorative arts. From this evidence and his examination of the early twentieth century he concludes that the events of the late nineteenth century shaped an American culture "forever wedded to a dialectic between authenticity and imitation" (299).

In *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918*, Stephen Kern argues that the same shifts in American society that Wiebe, Trachtenberg and Orvell are trying to understand occurred because of a fundamental reorientation in perceptions of time and space in Europe as well as America. While the manifestations of this perceptual shift were far-reaching and all-encompassing, one of the fundamental results Kern identifies is "the affirmation of a plurality of times and spaces" (8). Oddly, this affirmation comes about through its opposite. By moving toward a standardized time, a movement ushered in by the needs of the railroads and industry, societies were forced to acknowledge the arbitrary nature of time. The imposition of Standard Time in the 1880s and 1890s reinforced the anxiety-laden sense of distension and
incorporation identified by Wiebe and Trachtenberg respectively. It also highlighted the
dominance of the machine that Trachtenberg and Orvell both situate at the center of the
uneasy culture of the late nineteenth century. Additionally, it promoted cultural
disorientations that Kern labels “plurality” and “simultaneity.” Every member of the
community had to cope with an increasing awareness of the plurality of life, derived, at least
in part, from a sense of private time as distinct from public time. As Kern argues:

[t]he assault on a universal, unchanging, and irreversible public time was the
metaphysical foundation for a broad cultural challenge to the traditional notions about
the nature of the world and man’s place in it. The affirmation of private time . . . .
eroded conventional views about the stability and objectivity of the material world
and the mind’s ability to comprehend it. (314)

Simultaneity, encouraged by instantaneous electronic communications, affected the
perception of “the present” most profoundly, requiring it to make room for multiple spatial
realities:

The present was no longer limited to one event in one place, sandwiched tightly
between past and future and limited to local surroundings. In an age of intrusive
electronic communication “now” became an extended interval of time that could,
indeed must, include events around the world. (314)

While many of the cultural manifestations of this phenomenon that Kern discusses -
futurism, for example - occur in the twentieth century, the seeds of that shift are planted in the
1880s and 1890s. The disruption of time’s uniformity and irreversibility was furthered by
technologies such as the light bulb and the motion picture (29), the former turning night into
day, the latter creating illusions of flexible, unreliable time, especially in the manipulations of Georges Melies in the 1890s. The American Delsartians benefitted from the disruptions of shifting time and space, providing a void of authority into which they could enter and briefly hold the stage; the movement also yielded to the same fluidity of time, as its advocates relied upon solid distinctions between past and present and a firm expectation of idealized and universalized beauty. As Kern argues, these changes brought about a “leveling of traditional hierarchies” (315), and just as quickly swept out the Delsartian forms in favor of more malleable artistic descendants, ranging from realists to futurists, who rejected a fixed order to all things.

With all of these different conflicts swirling around the American Delsartians, it is a wonder that they wrote, taught, or performed anything of coherence whatsoever. In the context of the turmoil of these times, the contradictions of their writings can be examined in a more fruitful framework than would otherwise be available, and the lucidity and validity of many of these writings, still impressive today, can be appreciated as momentary, ephemeral fragments that rose above the tempest and that, largely through the work of Isadora Duncan, Ted Shawn, Martha Graham, and other early pioneers in modern dance, influenced performance training in American theatre beyond the dissolution of the American Delsarte movement.

Historians of theatre and culture have not had much success finding a meaningful place for Americanized Delsarte Culture in the larger landscape of Gilded Age American society. When we consider the many axes on which this system operated: social reform movement, aesthetic movement, health and physical education movement, professional
theatre training movement, to name a few, we can begin to recognize the historian’s problem. This problem becomes even more acute when we realize that Delsartians in America rarely spoke with one voice. Indeed, they occupied a number of positions along the conservative-progressive spectrum. In part, Delsartism was a conservative, traditional movement, both politically and socially, belonging to the polite society of refined ladies clubs. Yet it also demonstrated progressive social reform agendas, as many of its most vocal adherents called for physical culture as a remedy to the country’s ills and as a means of liberation for women. It advanced the cause of the professional woman, but primarily in the fields of teaching and social work, areas safely relegated to women as non-threatening to the professional status of men. It also promoted the professional woman while simultaneously sentimentalizing the image of woman as mother, nymph, or other ephemeral being. Philosophically and aesthetically, it tended to valorize the past and to idealize beauty, in contrast to the emerging voices of Realism in art, literature, and performance. Yet in its training methods, it could be surprisingly modern, encouraging an integration of mind and body and promoting rigorous standards of training for the professional performer. With all of these factors to account for and a multiplicity of voices, often discordant, within the movement, it is easy to see why scholars have failed to comprehend the significance of this system.

However, it is of fundamental importance to our understanding of American theatre and American culture that we start to unravel the most perplexing aspects of this enormously popular nineteenth century phenomenon. A proper understanding of Americanized Delsarte Culture is of vital importance to our perceptions of 1) Americans’ responses to the dislocation of late nineteenth-century life, 2) Victorian women’s identity and the early women’s rights
movement, and 3) the subsequent development of training practices in the American theatre. Each of these issues shapes the nature of this study, with the first serving as general backdrop to the investigation and issues two and three providing abiding concerns in Chapters Two through Four.

Whether historians focus their attention on the machines of industry and politics, cultural shifts, changes in literary styles, or changes in social and demographic patterns, few would deny the import of the closing years of the nineteenth century. Richard McCormick has argued that "most historians now regard the 1890s as a momentous turning point in American history" (103). Americans were seeking accommodation with the closing of the frontier, a new wave of immigration, a new culture of leisure and consumption, monopoly in business, labor unrest, economic turmoil, emerging imperialism, and a profound political realignment. Wiebe focuses on the election of 1896 as a fundamental turning point, Trachtenberg focuses most of his attention on the contradiction between the beneficent future promised at Chicago in 1893 and the disturbing price of progress illustrated by the surprisingly violent Pullman strike one year later.

All of these forces in action at once, coupled with a form of scholarly bias that Joseph Roach and others have described as "history written by the victors" (Roach 15), have led theatre scholars to severely limited assessments of the American Delsartians. Yet, I would argue that, just as the times were convoluted, a portion of that victory Roach mentions belongs to these women, but in a convoluted way. Their work wove its way into the modern sensibility in dance, theatre, and performance training. The challenge of unraveling and calling attention to this thread in American theatre, arts, and culture can best be met by
coupling the work of cultural historians such as Wiebe with the valuable insights of several key scholars in women's studies. From the intersection of these two fields we gain a new understanding of the seminal texts from the American progenitors of the Delsartian movement.

1.3 Women's Studies Models

The field of Women's Studies has illuminated nearly every aspect of the contemporary historian's investigation of theatre and culture, and questions of gender relations and gender identity are at the heart of this study. Primarily through their position as women did the authors of these Delsarte-based instructional manuals find a place for the social and cultural relevance of an aesthetic system. Scholars have paid little attention to their work as a form of early feminism because it was so frequently couched in terms of domesticity and refinement. But, as Sara Delamont has argued in her essay "The Contradictions in Ladies' Education," the advances for women in Victorian America had to come about through the most cautious of means: "No whisper of impropriety, masculinity or lowered standards must sully the occupants of educational institutions, or the whole cause could be lost" (146). For as many outspoken advocates of women's liberation like Emily Bishop and Genevieve Stebbins, there were many more who worked toward similar ends in the muted form of Delsartian refinement or the opportunities afforded by "professional" teaching and the entrepreneurial studio. To investigate these issues within the texts of the Delsartians the work of three scholars has proven particularly useful.

In The Feminization of American Culture Ann Douglas offers a compelling assessment of the growing identification between clergy and women in the late nineteenth
century. These groups found common ground as both were marginalized from the affairs of commerce in the emerging industrial society. At the heart of this marginalization of women is the pervasive sentimentalism found in all aspects of American culture. This sentimentalism shaped the dominant images of woman as mother, nurse, and care-giver. While grounded primarily in literature, Douglas’ analysis incorporates a changing model of history in which stasis was replaced with motion, and she charts the emergence of a “Muscular Christianity” in the 1890s to counter the perceived feminization of American culture (327). Each of these issues plays a prominent role in my analysis of the Delsartians’ efforts.

Martha Banta focuses upon the manipulated image of American women in her study: *Imaging American Women*. In addition to the sentimentalized image of women that Douglas explores, Banta offers a wide range of images drawn primarily from the women’s periodicals that flourished in the late nineteenth century. She argues that the image of the “American Girl” not only served as a means of keeping women in subordination, but also came to stand in for a wide range of “American” values. These values were almost always static, and were frequently used to oppose the more dynamic and unpredictable values of changing cultural conditions, whether those anxiety-laden changes were caused by new corporate and industrial practices or by waves of new immigrants. Central to this static image of women and to the constraints imposed by it upon women is the power of “grace.” Banta asserts that Delsartism furthered the desire for grace and gracefulness to the exclusion of the corporeal, thus weakening women by denying them a physical reality and interpreting them in terms of “grace, spirit, and light” (675). While I contest Banta’s assertion of the Delsartians’ incorporeality, her conception of grace is particularly useful for framing the image of the
woman as Delsartian.

Guided primarily by theoretical considerations, Nina Auerbach’s writings about the fluidity of women’s identity in Victorian culture provides an excellent catalyst for discussing issues of textual analysis and performance. Auerbach places the theatre and the act of performance at the center of a complex fear that Victorian society had of actors’ “disobedient energies” (Prin/e Theatricals 18). With theatre considered the “ultimate deceitful mobility” (4) in a traditional society that valued control, stasis, and order, Delsartian performance challenged the traditional society by valuing fluidity and transformation. As a medium of performance that relied on transformations from one pose to another, statue posing placed women at the center of this potential disruption of identity. Auerbach’s texts Private Theatricals: The Lives of Victorians, Women and the Demon, and her essay “Revelations on Pages and Stages,” in Narrative and Culture have been particularly beneficial in charting the disruptive potential of American Delsartism. Aided by the investigations of Auerbach, Banta, Douglas, and additional scholars of women’s identity, I examine the instructional texts of the Delsartians for their political potency as well as their cultural significance.

1.4 Delsartian Texts

Each of the five texts examined at length in this study represents key aspects of American Delsartism, and my treatment of each will weave its way through multiple chapters and various topics. As sites of intersection for complicated and often contradictory cultural influences, these texts pose a particular challenge for the historian. Before such a multidirectional journey begins, it is best we have a basic understanding about the nature of each of
these cultural documents and gain some sense of each volume’s unique contribution to
American Delsartism and to this study.

Emily Bishop’s Americanized Delsarte Culture. Self Expression and Health (1892,
revised 1895) serves as an example of the Delsarte system socialized, politicized, and adapted
to a physically-based form of self-expression especially suited to Victorian women. Bishop
taught Delsarte at the Chautauqua School of Expression, Chautauqua, New York, and her text
is replete with the moral uplift and cultural improvement espoused by the Chautauqua
movement. Trachtenberg and others have placed the Chautauqua movement at the heart of
the contradictions of late nineteenth century life, arguing that the turmoil of the late nineteenth
century not only opened the opportunity for, but created the necessity for “the healing
properties identified with high class culture” (145). As a cultural force, then, much of
Bishop’s version of Delsartism fit neatly into a Chautauqua image of a refined America that
served as “a virtually official middle class image of America” (Trachtenberg 143). Yet any
application of Chautauqua’s “middle class image of America” to Bishop’s text must be
tempered by a recognition of the more disruptive aspects of Bishop’s reformist agenda and
her ambitions for Delsartism’s role in changing the status of American women. These two
images, conservative middle class refinement and progressive women’s activism, exist side-
by-side in Bishop’s text. Read as a site of intersection for these competing visions, her text
offers a wealth of opportunities to explore the contradictions that fueled and undermined
Delsartism in America.

Julia and Annie Thomas’ Thomas Psycho-Physical Culture (1892) represents the
private commercial studio or conservatory environment through which many Americans were
introduced to Delsarte. Their efforts to start their own "Thomas Psycho-Physical Culture Association" and their effort to secure copyrights to the Thomas name reveal a competitive entrepreneurship foreign to most Victorian women. The content of the Thomas text often appears unremarkable. The Thomas sisters present discussions on "Care of the Feet" (243) and advice on a variety of "Falling Exercises" (54). Yet their text, shaped by Delsarte's system, firmly rooted in Protestant Christianity, and proprietary in nature, ranges from the mundane to the profound. Acknowledging such a text as the intersection of many aspects of American Delsartism and the culture that shaped it allows modern historians to better understand these writings and to incorporate them into our understanding of a tumultuous period in American culture.

Edward Warman's *Gestures and Attitudes* (1892) provides a rare perspective of a male Delsartian leader who was in sympathy with the progressive causes of his female counterparts. In his attempts to find a place for strong men in this movement, Warman charged his male readers to:

> Walk in a straight and narrow path, but do not make it so narrow as to cramp your individuality or individual rights. Be free. Be firm. Be true to the higher self. Be well-balanced. Be manly. Make your strength of manhood felt in your home, your religion, your politics, your daily intercourse with men. (422)

In that one passage, supported by male-inclusive exercises offered throughout Warman's text, we see a broader perception of Delsartism than most histories allow. Delsarte in Warman's hands becomes a vehicle for commercial boosterism, intended to refine the business world as well as the home. Warman's text is especially useful in providing a larger framework for the
interaction between Delsartism and a modern sensibility of American commerce and professional life that took hold in the late nineteenth century.

Eleanor Georgen represents the best example of the professional teacher within the theatre school movement. Her text *The Delsarte System of Physical Culture* (1893) was derived from her experience of teaching Delsarte at the American Academy of Dramatic Art. *The Delsarte System of Physical Culture* is sanctioned in a prefatory letter from Franklin Sergeant, the guiding force in the early decades of the AADA, which Georgen reproduces at the front of her text. For the purposes of this study, Georgen's text offers insights into the interaction between cultural, religious, and professional aspects of the movement. It also provides some of the most progressive statements of the era about acting training, drawing on the physiological theories of the time, but also presaging some of the basic tenets of Stanislavski-based actor-training in America.

The individual whose writings contribute most significantly to this study is Genevieve Stebbins. As the major proponent of Delsartism in America, she authored a large number of texts. Although initially a pupil of MacKaye, she did not hesitate to demonstrate her opinion that she had advanced the system beyond the work of not only her teacher but Francois Delsarte himself. Her published texts include *Society Gymnastics and Voice Culture* (1888), *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics: a Complete System of Psychical, Aesthetic, and Physical Culture* (1892), *The Genevieve Stebbins System of Physical Training* (1898), and six editions of her masterwork: *The Delsarte System of Expression* (published between 1885 and 1902). In the main I will focus upon *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics*, and the sixth edition of *The Delsarte System of Expression*. This final text, 507
pages in length, replete with illustrations, exercises, and social and political commentary, and representing the culmination of Stebbins' career, provides not only an insightful articulation of the System of Applied Aesthetics but also multi-faceted perspectives on American culture, gender identity, and actor training in the late nineteenth century. The contradictions that shape this text make it a particularly challenging text to decipher. These contradictions include a perspective that simultaneously harkens to an edenic past and forecasts a progressive future for Delsartism, a philosophy that is simultaneously esoteric and practical, and a coupling of secular and religious bases for her Delsarte work. Nevertheless, an understanding of the many facets of Stebbins' writings is essential to any effort to unravel the complexities of American Delsartism.

1.5 Delsarte Scholarship

The basic pattern of most of the current scholarship on Delsarte and Americanized Delsarte Culture has demonstrated the difficulties of coming to terms with this complex and often contradictory movement. The result has been a series of conclusions that the teachings of the "Americanizers" of Delsarte were irrelevant, dangerous, or hopelessly corrupted in their social, political, or commercial contexts. With little attention paid to the complex cultural shifts surrounding Delsartism's rise and fall in America, the scholarship regarding the effects of Francois Delsarte's theories on American acting have naturally been of limited scope. While scholars' opinions of Delsarte's original theories have been mixed, very few have written extensively about the American versions of Delsarte's system. Within the scholarship that does exist, several patterns and limitations readily appear. First, scholarship on Delsartism in America has lacked a clear enunciation of the cultural contradictions which
provided the movement its driving force and which shaped the activities of its leaders; instead, scholars have seen American adaptations of Delsarte's System of Applied Aesthetics as "perversions" with little or no cultural significance. Second, scholarship on Delsarte has undergone a gradual and incomplete change from the early twentieth century to the current decade. As part of this change some theatre scholars have been willing to rethink Delsarte's contributions to modern acting, but have stopped short of considering the long-term influence of his American disciples.

In the first half of the twentieth century even Delsarte scholars such as Claude Lester Shaver traditionally treated the Americanized versions of Delsarte's teachings as distortions rather than as systems of any practical value or cultural significance. In his 1937 Ph.D. dissertation Shaver claimed that "the Delsarte system was perverted into a health culture" (my emphasis) by books like Emily Bishop's *Self Expression and Health: Americanized Delsarte Culture* ("Delsarte" 4). For Shaver, most of the American contributions to Delsartism other than MacKaye's were little more than "a welter of unauthorized books, misunderstandings, distortions and quackeries." ("Delsarte" 4). Through the 1950s, Shaver maintained that the Americanized appropriations of Delsarte led toward the system's eventual irrelevance. This opinion is illustrated by a 1954 essay he wrote for *The History of Speech Education in America*, in which he argued: "The system finally became a routine mechanical system for the teaching of the expression of emotion largely through gesture and body position, accompanied by statue posing, tableaux, etc. By 1900 the system was largely outmoded. It is now only of academic interest" ("MacKaye" 216). Yet to dismiss the Americanized versions of Delsartism as "routine mechanical systems," as Shaver does, denies the complex aura of
the machine and words like "mechanical" in late nineteenth century life. Cultural historians have placed the machine and Americans' uneasy response to its influence at the heart of the turmoil of Gilded Age Society. For example, Trachtenberg argues that: "[p]erceived as an incalculable force in its own right, reified, fetishized, even demonized, the machine thus found a troubled place in the culture of the times" (42). In this context, the mechanical nature of the American versions of Delsarte's system places this seemingly innocuous movement regimen at the heart of a cultural war. By heeding the contradictions articulated by Trachtenberg and other cultural historians, theatre scholars can begin to move beyond a decontextualized technical assessment of American Delsartism's merits and consider this phenomenon as a key battleground for the multiple images of the machine - as hope and threat - in late nineteenth century life.

Scholarship on Delsarte and his influence began to change after the infusion of movement-based acting styles into American actor training during the 1960s. But in great measure, at the height of American method acting, Delsartism elicited critiques like those of Edwin Duerr. Duerr could write in his 1962 survey text, *The Length and Depth of Acting*, that Delsarte was little more than a fanatical classifier. Duerr thus dismissed his system and its followers as "dedicated but fuzzy" and "well-meant but weird" (325, 327).

The expansion of approaches to the physical training of the actor in the 1960s, driven in part by the prominence of Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, and their American adaptors like the Living Theatre and the Open Theatre, appears to have corresponded with a reappraisal of Delsartism among theatre scholars. By the 1970s a few theatre educators and practitioners began to advocate the reconsideration of Delsarte for modern training purposes.
In a 1972 article in *The Drama Review*, E.T. Kirby credited Delsarte with providing a means to 1) overcome dialogue-centered acting, 2) incorporate patterns of body communication, 3) develop an actor's expressive range, and 4) articulate the contradictions between text and subtext in Stanislavski-based training (64-67). Kirby then presented to his readers a modified version of Delsartian exercises as a regimen for modern actors. Since his article appeared, others have advocated applications of Delsarte beyond Stanislavski-based training. In his 1993 article “Commedia Delsarte,” published in *Performing Arts Journal*, Gautam Dasgupta argued that the anti-Stanislavskian training that grew out of the influence of Artaud could benefit from a re-reading of Delsarte:

Delsarte, insofar as his system addresses the nature of *the theatrical* and of *representation*, is not so far removed from us as he might seem. I would even go so far as to submit, tentatively, that Delsarte be looked at alongside Artaud, for it is in and through the latter's particular theoretical elaborations that the body has reclaimed its preeminence in the discourse of the present day theatre. (98)

Such “tentative” reconsideration is the pattern followed by a handful of theatre scholars who have rethought Delsarte’s application to modern training. Despite this limited reconsideration of Delsarte’s significance and potential usefulness to modern actors, scholars have written little about the exercises or philosophies of his American followers. The most prominent exception to this is Ruyter’s work, which is incorporated into this study. However, Ruyter’s investigation comes from scholarship in modern dance rather than theatre.

In the 1980s several unpublished studies advocated a re-examination of Delsarte's theories. Janis Dawn Clarke argued for the re-evaluation of Delsarte's teachings and their
subsequent influence on modern training. While Clarke's comparison of Delsarte's teachings to twentieth-century acting texts reveals the debt these owe to the Delsarte-MacKaye system, she reinforces the belief that the only Delsartians who merit study are the few gifted educators like MacKaye who implanted Delsartism in America. Clarke labels the second generation of Delsartians, including Emily Bishop and her many women colleagues, as quacks or "health faddists"(43), who corrupted the system and led to its demise. Even Genevieve Stebbins, who authored several of the most important and widely read American texts on the system, is critiqued as "a statue-poser [who] did much to foster this form to the general detriment of the system as a whole"(41). In her 1980 dissertation "Movement Training for the Actor: Laying the Foundation in Movement Principles" Leslie Carol Schreiber also argued for acknowledgment of the beneficial influence of Delsarte on modern American actor training. In her opinion, Delsarte, Emile Jacques-Dalcroze, Rudolf Laban and their followers were responsible for most of the innovations of twentieth century acting and dance training. She recognizes the debt owed to these innovators and draws attention to their contributions:

Actors and dancers who may know little of Delsarte or of his immediate pupils would probably be surprised to learn of his influence on the Denishawn school and subsequently on modern dance. ...Delsarte's was the first truly scientific study of both human behavior and expressive movement [and his] discovery that physical action can trigger a corresponding emotional state is now widely accepted. (190-91)

Yet, despite her significant contribution to any reconsideration of Delsarte's legacy, she does not address the political nature of Americanized Delsarte Culture. While this political inquiry is not her stated aim, these omissions nevertheless lead to a reductive and ultimately
unfavorable account of the Americanization of Delsarte. For example, in her treatment of
Stebbins she claims "Harmonic Gymnastics, which had at first filled a great need by
providing an acceptable form of female exercise, descended to the depths of artistic statue
posing, a form of high-class cultural entertainment" (31). This assessment denies the rich
mystical, historical, and liberating elements of this performance form as Stebbins envisioned
it - elements which shall be examined at length in Chapter 3.°

In the last ten years additional theatre scholarship offers the same pattern of praise for
Delsarte tempered by criticism for his Americanizers. This includes journal articles such as
Dasgupta's as well as a series of theses and dissertations. One of the most articulate of these
studies is David Tabish's 1995 dissertation "Kinesthetic Engagement Technique: Theories
And Practices For Training the Actor." Tabish offers a sophisticated examination of the
psycho-physiological connection in the history of American actor training. However, he fails
to examine the American followers of Delsarte and the legacy of their efforts to integrate
mind and body. Tabish acknowledges that Delsarte "made important contributions to
understanding the connection of external physiology to internal neurological states" (35), and
he rightly observes that Delsarte's acting theories did not promote the static posing that the
drawings accompanying instructors' manuals suggest. However, just as Clarke and Schreiber
had done a decade earlier, he reduces the Americanizers' contributions to this effort to "a
popular study of movement by young ladies' clubs which misinterpreted the point of
Delsarte's work" (36). Tabish ultimately concludes that "[s]uch practices were responsible for
Delsarte's work being misunderstood as merely over-rehearsed rhetorical conventions of
delivery" (36). Where does the influence of Georgen (or even MacKaye) on professional
training practices or the political and social progressiveness of Stebbins fit into this telling of history? Tabish manages to avoid these contributions of Delsarte's disciples in favor of a reductive history of American acting that identifies Stanislavski's arrival in America as the "alternative" viewpoint that emphasized "actor truth and honesty within performance" (36).

A few histories of American acting published in the last fifteen years have refined scholars' knowledge of the work of Francois Delsarte and its effect on American acting. By far the most comprehensive study of this kind is James McTeague's *Before Stanislavski: American Professional Acting Theory 1875-1925* (1993). McTeague draws on a wealth of information, including published and unpublished studies, the texts from training programs that were based upon Delsarte's theories, journal articles from the period, and personal interviews to argue convincingly that "[m]any of the theoretical principles espoused by the MacKaye-Delsarte system form the core of modern theory and method" (42). While McTeague remains focused on a few training schools run primarily by men and does not acknowledge the social and political impact of Delsarte in America, his study opens the door to wider examinations of Delsarte's influence in America. In *Actors and American Culture, 1880-1920*, Benjamin MacArthur makes a strong case for the contributions of Delsarte's theories and the advocates of Delsarte in America. MacArthur discusses even fewer schools than McTeague and is primarily focused upon the American Academy of Dramatic Art. However, he skillfully articulates the role of Delsarte's theories and schools of acting in professionalizing the American actor and American actor training. By doing so he invites a reconsideration of the political and social impact of Americanized Delsarte Culture not just in the development of the professional, but also in other aspects of American culture. His
concern with the actor as a cultural icon promotes a reconsideration of the culture than creates and supports the professional actor and becomes obsessed with that actor as personality. The Delsartians' image of the individual as artist and performer and their awareness of the potential political, social, and cultural power of their system offers excellent opportunities to explore the cultural changes that MacArthur identifies, just as his work provides a valuable framework for understanding the efforts of these women and their followers.

These recent texts afford excellent opportunities to reconsider the place of Delsartism in American culture. With the high visibility of Delsartian pseudo-scientific charts of the emotions, "Delsarte corsets" and "Delsarte wooden legs," and "Greekish" high society affairs, it is not surprising that progressive, balanced, and politically and culturally-aware scholarship about these disciples has been slow to move forward. To look beyond these most visible identifiers of Delsartism in America, historians must endeavor to see the American manifestations of this system as part of a larger attempt to come to terms with a society in turmoil and as an effort to chart a path of progressive reform within a powerfully conservative society and an emerging American theatre profession.

ENDNOTES

1. In her article, written for a 1990 collection of essays entitled Corporealities, Ruyter offers a breakdown of the impressive range of Stebbins' Delsartian performances from 1880-1903. She is left, however, struggling with the contradictions and unfulfilled political and artistic promise of the American Delsartian movement and of Stebbins' art form. This struggle manifests itself in the structure of the article, loosely composed as it is of a series of "excursions," in the series of unanswered questions Ruyter raises throughout the essay, and in her unsatisfying conclusion, which she caps with the phrase
“To be continued . . .” (98).

2. The complexity of some of the Delsartians’ basic ideas about the use of the body is suggested by the use of similar ideas in actor training today. The connection between American Delsartism, modern dance, and modern actor training regimens will be addressed in Chapter 5.

3. In terms of Delsartian acting theory, it would not be overstated to claim that Stebbins’ text had as profound an influence on that style of acting in the late nineteenth century as Stanislavski’s *The Actor Prepares* had on American advocates of his theories in the mid-twentieth century.

4. The machine image frequently appears in scholars’ assessments of Delsartism. For example, in his text *Players and Performances in the Victorian Theatre*, George Taylor states:

   *Despite his attempt to integrate mystical experiences, creative intuition and religious faith into his analysis, the "Delsarte system," as taught by his disciples, remained fundamentally mechanistic, and in practice his categorizing of physical gestures was as prescriptive as the technical handbooks of passions (150).* Taylor uses the mechanistic perception of Delsartism to conclude that the disciples’ applications of the system were the cause of excesses, ridicule, and, ultimately, the demise of the system. While Taylor focuses upon the English stage, there are many similar examples among historians of American theatre.


6. There are a few exceptions to this pattern that pre-date the 1960s. The first is a series of dissertations and theses produced in the 1940s by graduate students at Louisiana State University. These studies, supported by the University’s extensive Delsarte and MacKaye holdings and frequently cited in published texts and articles on Delsarte, offer a rich and widely available resource for the study of Delsartism in America. In the 1950s scholars in speech education, a field from which many university theatre departments emerged in the post-war years, also demonstrated the value of Delsarte’s theories in the histories of their profession. The second is the 1954 collection of essays edited by Karl Wallace, *The History of Speech Education in America*. In this text Delsarte’s work figures prominently in every essay that addresses the development of speech and theatre education. Yet, while most of these authors acknowledge the contributions of Delsarte and MacKaye, the contributions of all American Delsartians except a few male educators are either omitted or denigrated. In a statement with many parallels throughout these essays, Shaver, once again, in a phrase unaltered from his 1937 dissertation - judges these contributions to be a "welter of unauthorized books, misunderstandings, distortions, and quackeries" (Wallace 203).
Despite Schreiber’s advocacy of the Delsarte influence, her work is a prime example of the difficulty scholars have in assessing the work of American Delsartians. She is able to identify a uniquely American approach to Delsartism, but she highlights the abuses and avoids the cultural context of this movement:

Americans were not so much interested in actor training as in self-improvement, and in this spirit Delsarte caught on like wildfire. Delsarte became not only a major influence in the areas of speech and physical education, but a recognizable brand name for corsets and "esthetic" wooden legs."(17).

Furthermore, when she does acknowledge the “thirst for esthetic culture” in America, she does so only to emphasize the commercial aspects of Americanization, claiming that Delsarte books were staples for many publishers’ businesses (17). In fact, Schreiber and Carol Ann Hecht seem to face a similar dilemma. Hecht’s assessment of Delsartism suffers from the contradiction of acknowledging the practical (American) exercises as the most useful component, yet ridiculing the Americanization of Delsartian as a series of fads and misconceptions. Schreiber’s assessment is caught between the tension of ridiculing the Americanizers and praising the pragmatic American contribution:

Whether Harmonic Gymnastics originated with Delsarte or not, he is said to have given his blessing to MacKaye in his work in this area — and it is this practical, physical work that has influenced American theatre and dance far more than the underlying philosophy.(21)

Even as Schreiber begins to offer a more sophisticated explanation for the decline of Delsartism than many scholars put forth, she is still limited by a tendency to dismiss the American appropriations of Delsartism. In her estimation, these appropriations cause the system to sink to the "depths of artistic statue posing" (31-2). As is the case with many of the theatre scholars who have taken up the study of Delsartism, she seems unwilling or unable to consider the larger cultural factors for this American form of expression. Rather, she defines this Americanization primarily in terms of “decline,” and she looks for the reasons for this decline solely in the American practitioners:

Unfortunately, the system later fell into disrepute. It would be hard to say whether the blame lay with the philosophic followers who never bothered with the practical application or with the gymnastic followers who didn't understand that there was more to the Divine Method than the tricks they had learned to perform smoothly. Probably both groups contributed to the eventual ridicule of the Delsarte System.(31)

Delsarte’s influence had been argued years earlier in one of the most respected assessments from the 1960s: Garff B. Wilson’s *A History of American Acting*. In this text Wilson maintains that the teachings of "responsible students of MacKaye" influenced several generations of students, teachers, and performers. The result was that “the original inspiration of the Delsarte principles . . . came to exert a widespread but indirect influence on the development of American acting”(103). However, the significant contributions of Delsartism to American acting included the work of few individuals outside of MacKaye’s inner circle of colleagues. For Wilson, the “responsible students”
did not appropriate elements of the system for their own political or professional purposes. Instead, the adaptations of Americanizers of the system Wilson labeled "grotesqueries," "abuses," "perversions," and (again using the image of the machine) "a mechanical distortion so absurd as to discredit the art of elocution for several decades" (Wilson 102). While these labels may apply to some of the more outlandish or commercial American exploitations of the system, scholars' reliance on these terms in favor of an examination of the cultural and political motivations of many Americanizers confines even the most progressive scholarship to a woefully inadequate telling of this complex history.

9. As perhaps one measure of the swings in the reception of Delsarte scholarship among the theatre community, this text, originally McTeague's 1963 dissertation, remained obscure for thirty years until Scarecrow agreed to publish it. Unfortunately, by 1997 the text had already gone out of print.
CHAPTER 2

DELSARTIANS AS SOCIAL REFORMERS

When by self-knowledge and self-discipline women gain habitual, easy control of their bodies, they will have achieved an important emancipation.

-Emily Bishop, *Americanized Delsarte Culture* (1892), 35.

Grace, rightly understood, denotes strength instead of weakness. . . . The awkward person is self-conscious, the graceful person, self-possessed. This difference frequently makes the difference between success and failure in life.

-Edward Warman, *Gestures and Attitudes* (1892), 32-33

American Delsartism repeatedly promoted calls for social reform in American society. The women of the second and third stages of this movement frequently advocated the benefits of Delsartian ideals as tools for improving American society and enhancing the place of women in that society. The more progressive voices in this reformist movement, including those of Emily Bishop and Genevieve Stebbins, have been obscured by the sentimental, domestic, and fundamentally conservative aspects of
the movement. While many of the advocates of Delsartism were genuinely conservative, it is important to acknowledge that conservativism also served as a shield against criticism for those who wished to promote reform by one of the only means open to women. As Sara Delamont and Lorna Duffin have argued, the scope of activism for Victorian feminists was extremely limited:

The woman who deviated from the retiring domestic ideal was in constant peril: at any moment she might become one of the threatening, dangerous, unsexed, monsters incarnate, so abhorred by the conservative press. . . . The most successful feminist campaigners were those who . . . were able to reorganize the beliefs and values of the dominant male culture, who articulated their ideas in a form acceptable to that dominant male opinion and used the dominant ideas to achieve their own ends. (Nineteenth Century Woman 16)

Ironically, the efforts of Delsartian social reformers to work for women's emancipation were so evasive that generations of scholars in theatre and cultural history have overlooked them. In addition to exploring this camouflaged feminism in the writings of these women, I want to show that the Delsartians' identity as social reformers was shaped by a convergence of sentimentalism and pragmatism. In Section 2.1 I contrast pragmatism and sentimentalism, present the outlines of their convergence in Americanized Delsarte Culture, and argue that what appears as sentimental in Delsartians' writings often had an underlying pragmatic and ultimately progressive value. In the subsequent sections of the chapter I will analyze several key aspects of the social progressivism of American Delsartism. In Section 2.2 I will demonstrate that this
progressivism was prompted by Delsartians' belief in a “psycho-physical culture” wherein changing one’s body can shape one’s mind, will, and spirit. In Section 2.3 I argue that the progressivism of the Delsartians took its most visible form in their efforts to build a self-defined community of like-minded practitioners. This multi-faceted community, dominated by women but open to the contributions of sympathetic men, was moral and political in nature as well as social and artistic in endeavor. Within the exchange between pragmatism and sentimentalism, the conception of psycho-physical culture, and the emerging community of Delsartians, aspects of the fluid bureaucratic orientation continuously surface and then subside, sharing space with the immutable, static idealism that motivated Delsartism in America. The bureaucratic orientation was a mixed blessing for reform-minded Delsartians. It provided flexibility to their reform efforts, allowing these efforts to encompass many systems of belief, but it also conveyed a sense of intangibility, ultimately consigning their reform efforts to the margins of American commercial, social, and political activity.

2.1 Pragmatism and Sentimentalism

Of the many forces that exerted conflicting pressures on individuals in late nineteenth-century American life, pragmatism and sentimentalism were two of the most diametrically opposed. The tenets of Pragmatism were articulated most clearly by William James, professor of philosophy at Harvard University and one of the most influential intellectuals of the era. In *The Meaning of Truth* (1909) James outlined the tenets of Pragmatism:

The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth happens to an
idea. It becomes true, is made true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process (*The Writings of William James* 312). (author’s emphasis)

If, rather than seeking static, immutable truths, as a Platonist might, the Pragmatist seeks truth in process, then the merits of a philosophical position come from its practical effects on the lives of its adherents. Pragmatists sought, in James’ words, the “cash value” of an idea through the measurement of its beneficial effects upon individuals and society (*Writings* 311). One powerful strain of Delsartism in America, “Practical Delsartism,” moved away from the fixed precepts of Delsarte’s original philosophy and toward a more flexible practicality very much in line with Pragmatic thought.²

Practical Delsartism relied much more on demonstration and application than it did on a static ideal form or a Platonic model of truth. To be sure, the demonstration was often designed to prove a universal theory, but the instructor of Practical Delsartism encouraged, at least ostensibly, his or her students to see for themselves the validity of the demonstration and to seek applications in their daily lives. The use of demonstration as evidence can be traced back to Delsarte’s original studio in Paris. Delsarte was well known for his demonstrations of the gamut of emotions, and MacKaye’s prominence as Delsarte’s most impressive student was largely established through his skillful demonstrations of the master’s technique.³ In the United States this reliance on demonstration reached new prominence. MacKaye encouraged demonstration in teaching his students, including Genevieve Stebbins. In turn, Stebbins, Bishop, and Georgen extended and modified Delsarte’s original theory with extensive exercise drills in emotional display, breathing, composing and decomposing, and - to use Stebbins’ term

51
- "Harmonic Gymnastics." These instructors referred repeatedly to an American Delsartism that was, above all, practical and functional. Stebbins, for example, entitled Chapter IV of The Delsarte System of Expression "Modern or Practical Delsartism," and throughout the chapter and her other writings she rejected metaphysical abstractions in others' versions of Delsartism in favor of a modern, practical, "American" Delsartism.

None of the Delsartians were as rigorous in their arguments or their logic as William James, but they embraced and modified the underlying principles of Pragmatism, especially the view of truth as a process. In their modified version, truth was a process that for most Delsartians led to the basic tenets of Francois Delsarte's underlying philosophy. They also used the appearance of Pragmatism - although none used the term in their texts - to ground Delsartism in the social concerns of this world. The extent to which they converted esoteric Delsartism into a practical or pragmatic American derivative will be addressed in Chapter Four, as this effort is part of the professionalization of Delsartism in America. For the duration of this section, I would like to contrast the pragmatic appearance of American Delsartism with the sentimentalism most scholars attribute to the movement.

In contrast to Pragmatism, sentimentalism was removed from practical matters. Rather than truth as process it focused exclusively on "ideal" types. These ideal types could be found in the late nineteenth-century remnants of Romanticism, or in the more frequently seen sentimentalized heroes and heroines of nineteenth-century popular melodrama, dime-store novels, and serial installments in women's magazines. Although never a clearly articulated strain of philosophy in the way that Pragmatism was,
sentimentalism has been identified by women's historians as a powerful force in late nineteenth-century thought. Ann Douglas and Martha Banta argue that sentimentalism was one of the most insidiously misogynistic aspects of late Victorian culture. In *The Feminization of American Culture* Douglas highlights the sentimentalized role of mothers in society. In *Imaging American Women*, Banta targets the sentimentalized view of children and family life. Each analysis proves quite useful as a means to consider the intersection between sentimentalism and Pragmatism in the social reform agenda of the most outspoken Delsartians.

Douglas provides several strongly worded definitions of sentimentalism, all of which emphasize its role as a barrier to political power:

Sentimentalism might be defined as the political sense obfuscated or gone rancid... ostensibly private feelings which gain public and conspicuous expression.

... It has no content but its own exposure (254).

Within this framework, the nineteenth-century “lady” was disaffected from politics at least in part because sentimentalism served her needs better. Sentimentalism in this period took many forms, but what Douglas terms “the Cult of Motherhood” offers perhaps the clearest example of the role of sentimentalism in the status of these women. This special devotion to mothers was particularly strong in American society in the late nineteenth-century, and it can be traced to the increasing “influence” of women over family life and children in a highly industrialized society: “The cult of motherhood, like the Mother’s Day it eventually established in the American calendar, was an essential precondition to the flattery American women were trained to demand in place of justice.
and equality" (75).

Certainly even the most sophisticated and politically conscious Delsartians engaged in what Douglas would consider the worst excesses of sentimentalism. This applied to both men and women instructors. Consider, for example, the recommendation for an exercise to develop "Feather Movements:" offered in Warman's *Gestures and Attitudes:* "Plucking imaginary flowers, tossing them into imaginary baskets, or weaving them into imaginary garlands, is a beautiful and valuable exercise" (109). Such sentiments can predispose modern readers to summarily dismiss these exercises, but if we look more closely at sentimentalism as it worked within Delsartian Culture, then a more complex picture begins to emerge. The conservative framework of a religious sentimentalism seems to have provided rhetorical shelter for many Delsartians. What they promoted was more complex and ultimately more supportive of progressive women's aspirations than Douglas' or Banta's analysis would suggest.

To reveal the complexity and multiplicity of voices regarding sentimentality within Delsartian Culture, we need only consider a few of the disparate ways sentiment and sentimentalism were incorporated into Delsarte training and philosophy. Sentiment was sometimes differentiated from passion, as in Stebbins' enumeration of Delsarte's Law of Vocal Proportions: "There will be an intensive [sic] progression when this form should express passion . . . there will be, on the other hand, a diminuation of intensity where this form is caused by sentiment" (310). The concept was also used to distinguish between different means of appealing to an audience, as in Warman's distinction between voice and gesture: "The inflections of the voice are for sensation,
gestures for sentiment” (363). “Sentiment” is often used interchangeably with “feeling,” as is the case in this excerpt from Georgen’s text:

If we study and practice all the expressions separately and mechanically, the physical nature will unconsciously respond, when called upon to act, by giving ideal outward expression to the sentiment or feeling; because we are constantly training our own nature to the ideal, and in time learn to know no other expression (121).

But in the cases when “sentiment” and “feeling” are used synonymously in these texts, the modern historian would do well to remember that feelings are the commodities with which these instructors ply their trade. As such, they are the means to professional identity and power. In this context, sentiments are a valuable commodity that empowers the professional, reform-minded women within the Delsarte community. Their advice for accessing the emotions and understanding the pathways of the emotions is more technical instructions than sentimental self-exposure. This is suggested by Georgen’s instructions to her students:

These exercises are designed to help establish control and flexibility of the body; and the mechanical action is also necessary to teach expression from an active heart-center. It mechanically prepares the channels of expression by making them facile and ready to respond to impression. (Georgen 42)

These same Delsartians incorporate systems of thought prominent in the emerging fields of actor training and psychology such as monism. Joseph Roach has identified monism, or “the growing conviction that mind and body are organically inseparable and comprise
not a duality, but a continuum,” as a major premise of nineteenth-century psychophysiology and twentieth-century acting theory (162). Roach has traced the formulations of Lewes, the James-Lange theory, and Russian Reflexology to this shift away from Cartesian dualism and toward monism. Many Delsartians’ efforts, too, can be seen as an attempt to embrace this concept of monism, as in Georgen’s advice above and her encouragement of physical-emotional centering: “The emotional center [is] the breast, the home of the heart. . . . All action should radiate from the center” (Georgen 7). Georgen’s instructions, presented by an instructor from AADA and offered in a text for aspiring professional actors, suggest an effort to forge a modern, pragmatic sensibility rather than the weak-kneed sentimentalism that Douglas identifies in other facets of the late Victorian woman’s public and private life.

In this professional and pragmatic environment, references to motherhood in these texts seem to have a different purpose than to promote the de-politicizing sentimentalism articulated by Douglas and Banta. It seems rather that these women Delsartians were attempting to politicize one of the few territories that the majority of American women could claim as their exclusive domain in the Victorian era. The “cult of motherhood” for a number of Delsartians was a means to promote commonality, relying upon many of the same shared experiences that drew women together for the political purposes of suffrage and progressivism. Rather than fostering “the political obfuscated” (Douglas 254), it nurtured bonds between pragmatic, forward-thinking women. The Delsartians called on the visibility and status of motherhood as a means of
influence that stretched back to antiquity. The Thomas sisters cited the Roman model as an example, arguing that Roman mothers were physically trained so that they would produce better warriors. Through this example, the Thomases celebrate the exclusively female role of child-bearing. But instead of sentimentalizing motherhood, they equate the contributions of the woman as mother to those of the male warrior. They even claim that the “Roman matron and the Roman warrior are synonymous terms” (5-6). The Roman analogy serves as a powerful image for the Thomas sisters and their colleagues, an image that relies on their role as mothers, links them to the values of antiquity, and encourages their aspirations for a strong voice in their contemporary culture.

The image of woman as mother also serves as a fundamental component of the moral war waged by many Delsartians, men as well as women. Warman supports his contention that women are well suited to wage the moral battles of Delsartism by tracing the influence of mothers on the great men of history. It is out of respect for their impact in that capacity that he charges women with carrying on the work of Delsartism, “because we know what an immense power woman is for good and evil” (7). In these statements Warman reveals several fascinating elements of gender identity as it worked within American Delsartism. Firstly, he assumes for himself the power to advise women as a whole as well as the clarity of vision to assess the role of women throughout history and in his contemporary society. Secondly, he connects the potential of women in this movement and in Victorian society with the development of Western Culture, positioning his time as the culmination of events in Western history that make the current advances in his field and in the cooperation between genders possible. Lastly, he reveals the threat
posed by women, a threat that exists just beneath the surface of their public identity in Victorian culture. Warman's perception of women's unparalleled power to promote evil as well as good supports Nina Auerbach's argument that the subjection of Victorian women was, in fact, a "defensive response to the . . . self-transforming power surging beneath apparent victimization" (Women and the Demon 34). The role of mother lies at the root of this power for both good and evil, and thus increases the power of women in this society.

The image of woman as mother also serves to promote the image of woman as harbinger of culture. Stebbins quotes Delsarte: "It is sentiment which I have seen revealed in mothers; it is passion which we find in uncultured persons" (DSOE 309).

The role of woman as bearer of culture reveals an uneasy territory between the woman as professional, be it as an actor, as a teacher, or in some other capacity, and the woman as mother. In the estimation of Stebbins, Georgen, and many Delsartians, the duties of mother must win out. The reason, as illustrated by the Thomas sisters, is clear and compelling: the woman's success in her role as mother has a profound impact on the direction of American and Western culture, for only in their capacity as mothers can women "fulfill their duties as mothers and teachers of the race" (Thomas 5). In this context it is not surprising that motherhood wins out over the woman's professional identity; what is surprising is the amount of attention and encouragement given to the professional woman by Delsartians who saw this moral battle of mothers and "the race" waged in such absolute terms.

Rather than confining women's experience or breadth of knowledge, the concept
of motherhood held by many Delsartians seems intended to expand their understanding of the body for the benefit of themselves and their children, as when the Thomases encourage parents to read Hutchingson’s *Physiology* with their children and work on repairing their “defects” (10-11). In this example, representative of a powerful strain of thought in Delsartian culture, the role of mother serves as a means to legitimize the woman’s voice in the affairs of men and society at large, to position women to wage a moral and cultural war that carried great import for the direction of the American civilization as they envisioned it, and to promote increased knowledge of the body among the community of women. With such knowledge these informed, empowered women - mothers or not - were better able to resist the corsets and other restrictions dictated by the conservative values and attributes of their society.

Within the theatre this conservatism found its most public voice in the plays of George M. Baker, the era’s most prolific and successful writer of plays for amateurs. Fear of the potential threat posed by Delsartism to traditional perceptions of motherhood runs through several of his most popular plays. While Baker’s most famous lampooning of American Delsartism is his 1887 farce *The Seldarte Craze*, the best example of his perception of motherhood can be found in *The Grecian Bend* (1893). Both plays can be examined for their patriarchal assumptions and the resistance they posed to the theatrical and professional ambitions of women. In Baker’s *The Seldarte Craze*, several women pupils are the victims of crazed professor Archimedes Abbott and his Realistic School of Expression, a thinly veiled assault on MacKaye's Lyceum School. In his send-up of Stebbins' style of statue posing, *The Grecian Bend* - named for the pseudo-Grecian
outfits worn by many posers as they embodied classical statues - Baker features four young women, ages twelve to eighteen, who have become enamored of the latest "fashion craze" of statue posing. Mrs. Field, the forty year old mother of one of the girls, is the only character who has a clear sense of the proper duties of a woman, and rails against her daughter's request for a "Grecian Bend:"

I'll give you a "bend" that you'll remember, for taking Norah away from her washing. Mercy sakes! I shall never get my washing out. Was there ever such a plague as a house full of girls!(91)

By the play's conclusion, Baker has re-asserted the patriarchal strictures that the Delsartians attempted to challenge, and his once-vulnerable protagonist, eighteen-year-old Suzy, returns to her rightful place, agreeing to help Mrs. Field with her washing:

for I think it would be very useful to me . . . for, in the first place, I shall learn to wash; and, in the second place, I'm convinced it is just the exercise necessary to prepare me to bear with resignation, when I reach home, the latest infliction of fashion, - "A Grecian Bend" (91-2).

In this, the play's final line, Baker manages to ridicule the Delsartians, diminish their exercises as a passing "fashion," and restore the patriarchal order advocated by Mrs. Field, the conformist model of motherhood.

Baker's strong reaction against the Delsartians' image of motherhood challenges Douglas' conclusion that motherhood served only as a means to promote a disempowering, sentimentalized role for women. But what of that other symbol of domesticity: the child? How did the image of the child function within Americanized
Delsarte culture? Martha Banta argues that the sentimentalized image of children reflected a larger sentimentalization and subsequent disempowerment of the image of women in late nineteenth-century American society. It is true that many Delsartians identified themselves with the image of children, an identification which might suggest a disempowering sentimentalization in their efforts. However, when we look more closely at the use of the image of children in their work, we find a situation more complex than Banta's analysis supports. Two phenomena seem to be working simultaneously in the Delsartians' use of child images: the child of God and the child as model of naturalness. Both of these images furthered the cause of progressive reform.

References to the individual as a child of God are frequently commingled with direct quotations from scripture and references to the body as a temple. This Christian identification played a significant role in the moral war waged by the Delsartians; it grew out of Delsarte's own deeply held Catholic convictions, which infuse his philosophy with Trinitarian theories and a frequent reliance on religious explanations to components of his system. Christian identification also enhanced the sense of community and mission among Delsartians, as they worked for the reform of body, mind, and spirit. Within this aspect of the Delsartian's use of child images, many examples can be found. These examples include the sentimentalized encouragement of Bishop as she guides her students through a series of "sleep exercises," her final instruction being "trust . . . then sleep comes as a tender enfoldment from Him who giveth his beloved sleep" (170). Yet Delsartians also move beyond the symbolic image of childhood to appeal to the child that is growing into adulthood. These appeals reflected the open-ended potential of
youth, as found in the dedication from *Thomas Psycho-Physical Culture*:

> to young women and young men to whom is committed the completion of the
> building of the temple, either for the soul's best growth and advancement, or its
> debasement and depredation. (iii.)

Later in their text the Thomases translate this open-ended encouragement into a more specific reform item, calling for a deliberate effort to train boys as well as girls:

> Our last plea for the girls is that the boys may have the same training in physical and moral culture that we demand for the girls; that they shall stand on the same platform of morality, or virtue, and self-control as that upon which we place the girls; that they demand for themselves the same correct living in all respects, and the same code of morality, which they demand for their mothers, wives, sisters, so that they may prove true friends, helpmates, and mates for the girls worthy of their confidence and love (21-22).

In these statements the image of the child is simultaneously tied to a traditional morality and the means to inculcate a new sense of "correct living" between the sexes. Still moralistic, it nevertheless articulates a vision for mothers, wives, and sisters, that transcended the existing limitations of those relationships as the Thomases saw them. These reforms are encouraged not only in children's education, but across a wide range of relationships between men and women, and are expected to affect all future relations between the sexes. As such, the child and its mother offer the Thomases a personalized element for their reformist appeal, and these provide powerful images and rhetorical cover for their progressive agenda. In this way, their use of the child image is more
complicated than the impotent sentimentalism found in Douglas’ and Banta’s analysis. Here we see the simultaneous promise and limitation of the bureaucratic orientation for Delsartians. As a means to enact social reform, their system was fluid enough to simultaneously accommodate idealized sentimentality and pragmatic reforms, yet the results were intangible. The Thomases pronounce their call for education reform of boys and girls, but their pronouncement is all but hidden in the sentimental trappings it wears, and it appears aimed at an audience of children and their mothers who are largely removed from the vital affairs of American society.

The second aspect of the Delsartians’ child images that complicates a simple labeling as “sentimentalism” is their use of the child as a model of naturalness in movement and thought. In their instructional texts many of these authors argue that their fellow Delsartians should be more like children. For example, Bishop suggests that if her students remove tension to return to the body’s natural condition, the would “become as little children . . . receptive to vital energy” (69). In doing so she is using the image of the child as natural and free in direct contrast to the image of individuals, particularly women, circumscribed and inhibited by Victorian codes of deportment, fashion, and behavior. Bishop’s suggestion is sandwiched between numerous complaints about women’s status in society. For example, later in her text she argues:

An exaggerated sense of duty leads many a woman to anxious, careless activity: she feels that she must constantly be doing something, thinks that idleness is sinful (author’s emphasis). (181)

This is but one of many admonitions she offers in her text regarding the imposition of
societal rules of behavior. In this context, the analogy to children and the image of the
natural child in Bishop’s text serve as a means to retrain the bodies of women. Rather
than sentimentalizing and diminishing women, Bishop used the child image to challenge
the patriarchal codes of behavior in Victorian culture, empowering women and
increasing their potential to move beyond Victorian strictures.\textsuperscript{13}

2.2 Psycho-Physical Culture

By incorporating sentimentalized perceptions of motherhood and childhood into
their reform efforts, Delsartians supported their cause upon two pillars of the Victorian
image of women. The women who recast these images of women also employed
Delsartism to recast their society’s perceptions of gender, class, or professional status.
On a personal level, Delsartism could be a means to recast one’s mental state, morality,
and social status through physical development. At both the societal and personal level
the expansive reach of American Delsartism led many to refer to the system not in terms
of a “regimen” but rather as a “culture.” This culture, referred to in various texts as
“physical culture,” “psycho-physical culture,” and “health culture,” touched on all
aspects of the Delsartian’s life.\textsuperscript{14} Framing Delsartism as a “culture” can also be seen as
part of the bureaucratic impulse. Systems should have clear objectives and means of
achieving those objectives, but cultures can be amorphous. As a culture American
Delsartism could embrace everything and yet provide nothing tangible. The system
could provide the promise of culture to an individual, as in Edward Warman’s suggestion
that “the greater the freedom of the joints, the more cultured the individual” (35).
However, the most significant aspect of this culture for social reformers was its power to
free them from their current limitations. Bishop focuses upon this liberating power in her description of the aims of Delsartian psycho-physical culture:

Self-Expression and Health Culture [also referred to as “Americanized Delsarte Culture”] seeks first to emancipate people from the bondage of wrong habits, from the influence of heredity, and from the effects of one-sided education. It teaches the natural use of all parts of the body. (Bishop 23)

One can best gain an understanding of the Delsartians’ concept of psycho-physical culture - both its pragmatic reformist promise and its sentimentalizing intangibility - by considering their various opinions about psycho-physical symbiosis. These opinions take into account not only the physical body, but the larger cultural arena of power, morality, and fashion.

2.2.1 Psycho-Physical Symbiosis

Different instructors offered various applications of psycho-physical symbiosis. It formed the basis for psycho-physical culture, and arguments for its value to American Delsartians were almost always intertwined with definitions of psycho-physical culture. For example, the Thomas sisters used this symbiosis as the basis of their claims for with claimed that “psycho-physical culture may be defined as those exercises or movements of the body excited and sustained by soul-force, and directed by, without taxing, mental activity” (Thomas 23). In Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics, Stebbins put forth the following definition:

By the term psycho-physical culture we mean a completely rounded development of body, brain and soul; a system of training which shall bring this grand trinity
of the human microcosm into one continuous, interacting unison, so that nothing
shall be useless, nothing thoughtless, and, consequently, nothing that is vital
wasted. (57)

Physical culture also covered a broad range of topics from the esoteric to the mundane.
In this regard, the headings for various sections of the Thomas sisters’ text, *Thomas
Psycho-Physical Culture*, provide some insight into the range of topics covered under
physical culture: “The Care of the Temple,” “The Care of The Hair,” “Teeth and Breath,”
and “Psycho-Physical Exercise Dress.” While the Thomas sisters’ headings may make
the subject seem little more than a pastime, Bishop and many others attempted to bring
the weight of science, or at least the appearance of science, to bear on their training and
use of the body.

At the heart of this pseudo-scientific effort was a symbiosis between what Bishop
referred to as “the principles of psychology as well as of physiology”:

This culture recognizes that all movements are principally from within, every
movement is the manifestation of a thought, of an emotion, or of the unconscious
action of some nerve-centre; but it also recognizes that bodily movements,
consciously made, react upon the inner-directing powers. (23-4)

She assured her readers that real physiological change, and subsequently the more
profound (and admittedly more amorphous) physical-cultural change could only be
brought about through great effort, as the student endeavors to change habits of body and
mind: “Psycho-physical discipline is necessary to overcome a bad habit; new nerve paths
must be made in brain and in body” (185-86). She also stressed both the purpose and
holistic nature of this type of training: "The entire body must be made respondent if we would give all thoughts and emotions truthful representation. The training of isolated members . . . is inadequate . . . all parts must be in harmonious relation to one another" (187). By seeking to enhance the range of emotions her students could truthfully convey, Bishop was pursuing a surprisingly modern-sounding goal, one that remains a frequently stated objective of acting texts in use today. At the same time, she also encouraged the liberating potential of physical culture for all aspects of the individual's development, arguing that this training not only helps one to express one's feelings, but could actually help one to experience those feelings more fully: "the gymnastics of expression have relation to the growth of the mental and emotive natures, as well as to the growth of the physical" (25). Her belief in the reciprocity between the physical body and mental powers (as well as the spiritual nature) allowed Bishop to channel physical work into behavioral and cultural change.

A gymnastics of expression designed to expand the "mental and emotive natures," and based upon her belief that bodily movements "react upon the inner directing powers," provide for Bishop a physical method to achieve the emancipation she repeatedly encourages. She constantly railed against the physical limitations Victorian decorum imposed upon women, and she offered a means to rediscover of natural physicality as a way to counter that decorum. Her deliberate and repeated connection of body and mind invited expansive thought as well as expanded physicality:

Of course, before the body can take on the expression any sentiment, as of hope, a corresponding thought must be - consciously or unconsciously - in the
mind. . . . This interdependence of the mind and the body, of the feelings and the
outward manifestations - or the Law of Correspondence - is the great principle
underlying the harmonious, educational movements of the gymnastics of
expression. (26-27).

Through the Law of Correspondence, therefore, Bishop's exercises, designed to promote
"freedom" and "strength" (28), would encourage these women - more than any other
means available to them - to conceive of themselves as free and strong. By doing so,
these gymnastics worked to change minds, behaviors, identities, and ultimately cultures,
through ostensibly physical and deceptively simple exercises. The bi-directionality of
influence between body and mind thus provided a means to politicize a form of physical
education.

Promoting this physical education provided an opportunity to wrest control over
the female body away from male authorities. In an age when corsets were markers of
femininity and hysterectomies were the means to overcome feminine weakness, recasting
one's outlook through the conscious, systematized physical manipulation of one's mental
and emotional state offered a woman an unprecedented and readily available means to
exercise power over her own body. This system, typically transmitted by a female
instructor to a female student through the use of their own bodies, represented a means to
circumscribe the patriarchal control of male authorities over women. That such a
politically-charged effort is mingled with and often masked by health considerations is
not surprising when one considers the medical profession's attitude toward female
patients in the late 1800s. The medical publications of the period are filled with
questionable cures for women's ailments. The most harmless remedy seems to have been extended rest, the prescription that leads to dementia for Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892). The more extreme remedies included the internal use of silver nitrate or leeches, as well as the surgical removal of the clitoris. In the late 1800s, as Ann Douglas and others have argued, women were systematically removed from the medical profession, and many doctors had a powerful economic incentive to promote an image of the perpetually ill middle class woman. In this context, a physical regimen that advocated awareness of one's own body and exercises as remedies to common ailments placed women in their own care as a means of empowerment and self-preservation.

For most Delsartian instructors, the healthy, natural, unencumbered body was prized above conventional expectations for clothing, medical care, or decorum. These instructors connected the risk of physical misuse with mental and spiritual harm: "When one loses his physical balance, he is very likely to lose his mental balance" (Warman 85). Such concerns for the betterment of the whole organism came under the label of "health culture" for Bishop, the Thomases, and Stebbins. Health culture was the basis for Bishop's instructional approach in *Self Expression and Health Culture* as well the means by which she hoped to attract a broad audience to the benefits of the Delsarte System. A complex negotiation takes place in the pages of these instructional texts. In accordance with the bureaucratic orientation, these instructors are repeatedly moving between non-threatening domestic images of women and progressive advocacy for women's liberation. This liberation is most often based on the bi-directionality of the physical and
mental aspects of the body, and it illustrates the frequency with which health and well-being share the stage with issues of power and control over one's own identity and image. These issues of power and control surface in Delsartians' efforts to 1) refine the morality of their society through calls for greater attention to physical education and physical well-being, and 2) wage a war against the worst restrictions of Victorian fashion.

The bureaucratic impulse within the Delsartians' writings on physical culture and the bi-directionality of body and mind took many forms. In typical Delsartian fashion, bi-directionality was governed by a series of laws which determined its functioning upon the person and through which its influence could be observed in other aspects of Delsartian practice. Most American practitioners infused their traditional religious orientation into Delsartian principles, yet taught Delsartism primarily through practical exercises rather than a faith-based theory. To this combination of the religious and the practical they added laws they claimed to draw from contemporary science. This search for laws is frequently illustrated by Stebbins' advice to her students, such as her dictum:

All forms of gymnastics which are truly esthetic must be based on the Laws of Grace and accompanied with exalted ideals in the mind. Each motion must include the principle of evolution from centre to circumference, the ideal in the mind being the root from which the action receives its life-impulse and direction. (424) 19

In this one sentence, to explain why a form of gymnastic exercise she has created is beautiful, Stebbins merges simultaneously the Laws of Grace, the Law of Correspondence, and a vague reference to evolution. Stebbins herself admits the
potentially unsatisfying nature of her reasoning, acknowledging the difficulty some readers might have with her attempts to explain reciprocity of physical and mental activity:

This is delicate ground, and will make some of you cry "Mechanical." ... Think seriously a moment. Certain attitudes, by extending or contracting the muscles, by compelling the breath to come and go more rapidly, by increasing the heartbeats, cause physical interior sensations which are the correspondence of emotion. The emotion is then slightly felt, but you must also bear in mind that the sign is first formed within; so, after all, the exterior expression does not come first. In the mesmerized subject, the idea was in the artist's mind. I am treading on eggshells here, I am conscious. The artistic idea within must form the outward expression, but that idea seems in genius to be unconscious; you cannot mentally plan it at the moment of its execution. (141)²⁰

Such reasoning leads Stebbins to claim that "[a] perfect reproduction of the outer manifestation of some passion, the giving of the outer sign, will cause a reflex feeling within" (141). This reciprocity encouraged connections between physical and mental development: "Psycho-physical culture, then, is the perfect union of harmonic gymnastics and dynamic breathing, during the formulation of noble ideals in the mind" (Breathing 66). The exact nature of that nobility for Stebbins is usually an idealized model of ancient art, sometimes it is an image taken directly from nature, at other times it is a mingling of the natural and the ancient. Regardless of the source, Stebbins' attempt to meld imagination to physical training is an effort that remains at the core of most
movement regimens a century later, and was the driving force for changing the bodies and the lives of the disciples of this system. Reciprocity repeatedly found its way into practical instructional strategies. For example, Stebbins advised her fellow instructors that her exercises should always be accompanied by music “to aid the imagination” (Breathing 73). Reciprocity also motivated grand proclamations by these authors intended to unite their traditional religious perspective and the apparatus of modern science. In accord with a secularizing bureaucratic impulse, science for the Delsartians was concerned more with a body of results than a rigorously logical method:

Is it too much to ask of Science that she shall interpret the gestures, attitudes, bearings, tones and inflections of man, and disclose the laws by which these expressions represent the faculties, nay more, how the thoughts, passions and emotions can be influenced? . . . psycho-physical culture, based on the laws of . . . Delsarte, will contribute to this knowledge. (Bishop 190)

Reciprocity connected the practical and metaphysical worlds of Delsarte’s philosophy. These instructional strategies and proclamations shared center stage in the Delsartian culture, and both were seized upon by Delsarte’s practical-minded American adherents, including Stebbins, who claimed that mental imagery served to “complete the trinity” of body, spirit, and mind that she sought to reform (Breathing 74).

In outlining the scope of psycho-physical reciprocity, these Delsartians also attempted to draw upon the contributions of many fields. Stebbins intermixes references to classical statuary, Renaissance paintings, modern medicine, Eastern philosophies, and Christian theologians. Eleanor Georgen referred to acting teachers, as well as the writers
Emily Bishop made references to social reformers, religious figures, and authorities in the field of elocution. For example, in delineating the limits of psycho-physical culture, she found teachers of elocution particularly useful for confirming her observation that physicality alone was insufficient: "Mr. S. H. Clark, eminent teacher... says 'Assuming the externals of an emotion will never call up an emotion that has not at some time been experienced" (183). The bureaucratic orientation, for all of its ultimate intangibility, provided a flexibility that allowed American Delsartians to embrace all fields of study and adapt the materials therein to suit their own needs. The difficulty for social reformers within this movement was fitting the endlessly fluid bureaucratic impulse with the rigid idealism that grounded their systems. Typically, when this accommodation became tricky, Delsartian instructors turned to tangible bodily processes, exercises, or examples of mind-body unity drawn from specific individuals in the present rather than idealized types drawn from an ageless tradition.

This narrowed focus on the tangible physical aspects of the human body in the present can be found in many Delsartians' discussions of one's ability to use psycho-physical reciprocity to gain power over one's own body and subsequently one's identity and image. For example, Stebbins argued that manipulation of one's breathing could allow oneself to experience a range of emotional states:

**Breathing is the basis of mental life and physical activity. It is the grand foundation-pivot, around which every other form of culture must revolve.** . . . It is possible to breathe yourself into almost any kind of mental and nervous condition, from the coma of sound sleep to the height of hysterical passion.
To demonstrate the level of control physical manipulation can exert over one's emotional state, Stebbins draws an analogy between this type of manipulation and hypnosis. Again, in this example the tangible, specific individual rather than an idealized type serves as the basis of her argument. She recounts hypnotic experiments of French doctors in which a guard, once placed under a trance and positioned by an artist in a pose intended to depict fear, "felt the emotion, and described himself as experiencing the throes of terror" (author's emphasis) (141) Warman directs the reciprocity uncovered by Delsartism toward changing specific emotions, arguing that hope may be overcome by gloomy images and by "breathing in harmony" with those images, while fear and despair could be changed in the same way (19). If fear and despair could be altered, then so could complacency and submissiveness. Control of the physical invites control of the emotional, and control of the emotional state invites greater control of one's identity. Delsartian Psycho-Physical Culture offers the means to reshape one's identity from that of conventional housewife or frivolous society lady to that of the artist, professional, crusader, or warrior. As I shall explain in Chapter Three, too often this freedom was fleeting, available only momentarily in performance or the confines of the classroom exercise. Combined again with the idealized image -- of beauty or "woman" -- that shadows Delsartian posers, educators, and students, the tangibility of this reform becomes frustratingly elusive. These widely circulated texts suggest that many women, drawn to this flexible belief system, sought tangible benefits in their physical and emotional life. The extent to which the idealized image of women promulgated by
Delsartism limited the transference of that physical and emotional betterment into progressive social and political agendas is difficult to measure. Perhaps the best way to begin assessing this transference is to consider the political undertones of Delsartians’ efforts at moral reform and fashion reform, two arenas in which Victorian women could most easily translate their personal concerns into reformist agendas.

2.2.2 The Physical Body as Cultural Phenomenon: Morality, Fashion, and Power

In the Delsartians’ battle for better morals, the symbiosis between mind, body, and spirit stood at the heart of a crusade and served as the chief weapon to bring about their conception of a more virtuous, noble world. Because of this symbiosis, the Delsartians felt uniquely qualified to impart moral guidance through physical conditioning. Their texts are replete with warnings about the connections between moral and physical failings, and the damage that inattention to physical culture can bring about.

Bishop warns her readers:

Allow a girl habitually to express carelessness, diffidence, self-abasement, disdain or arrogance in her physical bearing, and corresponding moral weeds are planted in her nature. (184)

As she calls specific attention to the effects of poor physical culture on young girls, she suggests that women are particularly susceptible to wayward behavior. The special significance of Delsartism for women is presented here not simply as a means to greater freedom, but as the means to an increasingly secularized form of Christian salvation. Such connections between one’s body and one’s morals were shaped by the quantifying fervor of Delsartism, and by the tensions between a rigid idealism and fluid bureaucratic
orientation. Despite these competing tensions, moral crusading lent an authority to Delsartian efforts at social reform and ultimately allowed women to find a contentious voice in a society that frequently expected their silence.

The quantifying fervor found in Delsartism, a trait that links it to the bureaucratic orientation in late nineteenth-century America, led some Delsartians to atomize the anatomy of the body, interpreting each body part for its influence upon the "moral zone" as opposed to the "vital zone." This atomization not only influenced the structure of Delsartian gymnastics, it also led to questionable pronouncements about the moral value of various parts of the body, as in Warman's admonition that, "[i]f the heart leads, one is more apt to do right, but when the feet lead; one may wander in and by forbidden paths" (Warman 359).

Many Delsartians, including Warman, argued that the interaction between physicality and morality worked both ways. Not only could refining one's physicality improve one's moral outlook, one's moral behavior also shaped one's physical body. In considering this duality Warman cautions his readers:

> Do not delude yourself with the idea that you can lie down in the dark cellar of vice and impurity . . . and that you can emerge from such surroundings and conditions, and step forth into the clear sunlight of heaven, and show no traces of these secret, sinful thoughts and actions. We would that . . . our young men and young women be made to realize that their thoughts are chiseling away at their features with greater accuracy than ever sculptor chiseled marble. (Warman 362)

Bishop also cautions her readers to examine the bearing of the physical specimen to
discover the individual’s moral character: “The stoop-shouldered, hollow-chested attitude may denote physical weakness or moral weakness - as cowardice, hypocrisy, or mock humility” (43). There seems an inherent contradiction between the rigidity of features “chiseled” by moral impurities and the fluidity that underlies the ability to improve one’s morals through gymnastics. To downplay these contradictions, a common solution for these instructors is to retreat into idealized forms. For Stebbins these forms are most frequently found in classical statues, for Bishop, a static, idealized image of beauty is held up as counterforce to a potentially troubling moral fluidity. Her goal in this regard is to indoctrinate the pupil to “the true and the beautiful in physical habits, as well as in morals, that the vicious may have no attraction to us” (117). Fixed ideals offered to enhance the stature of these Delsartians in the moral battles of a Victorian culture in flux. However, the rigidity and intangibility of a Delsartian ideal like “the beautiful” made its incorporation into an agenda of meaningful reforms problematic.

No text demonstrates the advocacy of moral reform through Delsartism more forcefully than the Thomas sisters’ Psycho-Physical Culture. From their dedication to parents and “especially to mothers . . . teachers . . . the members of the W.C.T.U.” and all those who bravely work to abolish anything that “defiles, defaces, and deforms the temple” (iii.), to their repeated calls to salvage the virtue of the race, they viewed the physical as the primary battleground for their moral crusades. For the Thomases, women hold a special power to uplift society’s morals, and for that reason deserve every opportunity to fulfill their potential:

That woman may fulfill her mission, in elevating of the race, we claim for her
every opportunity possible for preparing and perfecting her for the work. To this end she should be admitted to the higher universities and colleges... [b]ut let us begin with physical training. (20)

Thus the crisis of the perceived moral crusade and its implications for the race is utilized as an opportunity for improvement of the status of women. Indeed, threats to American morality that come from distant monopolies, waves of immigrants, and an increasingly exploitative economic system compels society to admit women to its most valued institutions. Physical training not only reforms morals, it paves the way for very pragmatic advances in women’s status in society, and the perception of a moral war emboldens women who would not otherwise be outspoken reformers. Judging from their text, their exercises, and their physical appearance, the Thomases were two of the most conservative Victorian matrons imaginable. Yet they do not meekly seek admission to a male world; they demand it as part of their moral crusade. They claim for themselves and their followers a “woman’s right to a knowledge of all that pertains to her physical birth, life, and death” (10), arguing that “upon this knowledge and its practical application hinges the moral as well as the physical well-being of the race” (10).

Even Stebbins, the most secular of the Delsartians, made numerous references to the moral power of Delsartian physicality, claiming that her own most visible contribution to the system, artistic statue posing, “has its spiritual value in education, since it gives rise to noble ideas” (DSOE 456). Stebbins’ texts also emphasize the value of moral connections made by audiences viewing the artistic work of Delsartians. She applies this to Delsarte’s various Laws of Speech - most of which govern the use of parts
of speech - identifying them as "moral manifestations of art" (*DSOE* 304). She also offers detailed locations and justifications for the connections among moral zones of the body, breathing patterns, and intended effect upon an audience:

Delsarte taught diaphragmatic breathing, which throws, during inspiration, the moral zone into greatest prominence. Clavicular breathing brings the chest or mental zone into action. It is an hysterical method, only to be used when the dramatic situation demands sobbing, gasping utterance. (*DSOE* 288)

In this we see the intersecting values of a moral crusader, a pragmatic professional instructor, and an artist considering the means to achieve a desired response from an audience. Psycho-physical reciprocity served the interests of many different types of Delsartians, and had the potential to challenge the expectation that women should subsist in silence at the margins of society.

Psycho-physical reciprocity also found expression in the Delsartians' dualistic relationship with the fashion world. Delsartians frequently attacked traditional fashions that encumbered women and dictated unnatural clothing. However, American Delsartism is also intertwined with fashion and leisure. The women who took up the study of Delsartism were typically middle class, and likely supported financially by fathers, husbands, or other male figures to the extent that they could engage in leisure activity. One of the most frequently employed images of the Delsartian woman is that of a society lady who engages in posing entertainments as one of her many tea room activities. This image is supported by several of the Delsarte-influenced texts published in America in these years, including Florence Howe Hall's *Social Customs* (1911) and
Francis Hoyle's *The Complete Speaker and Reciter for Home, School, Church, and Platform* (1902), as well as many of the submissions to *Werner's Magazine*. However, focusing on this aspect of Delsartism alone denies the larger project in which the most active Delsartian reformers were engaged. While they often bowed to social customs and advised their readers on proper etiquette in specific situations, they also challenged codes of behavior they considered unhealthy or unnatural. Bishop argued that a yawn, while not considered polite, was perfectly natural and should be freely exercised (81).

Laughter, as well, was a natural occurrence that Bishop argued was stripped from women in polite Victorian society: “few women are able to laugh . . . but only sniff and titter” (82). Style and the effort to be stylish at the expense of naturalness also merited the scorn of many Delsartians:

Style, if inharmonious, cannot be pretty. One’s dress, although in the latest fashion, may be so unbecoming as to be ludicrous, while, on the other hand, a lady or gentleman may not be dressed according to the latest fashion plates, and, yet be dressed in such a becoming manner that he or she may be said to be exquisitely dressed. (Warman 350).

It is important to note here that the most restrictive dictates of fashion were seen as harmful to men as well as women, and that both men and women advised on this topic. Eleanor Georgen, after a lengthy discussion of the principles of proper attire, insisted that “the same suggestions in regard to suitable apparel also apply to men” (16). To illustrate this point she offered depictions of a properly dressed man and woman side by side engaged in a series of exercises (Figures 2.1 and 2.2). Freedom of movement and
Figure 2.1. Appropriate Dress for Delsarte Male and Female (Georgen Figure 1).
From Eleanor Georgen's *The Delsarte System of Physical Culture* (1893).
Figure 2.2. Appropriate Dress for Delsarte Male and Female (Georgen Figure 2). From Eleanor Georgen’s *The Delsarte System of Physical Culture* (1893).
naturalness were the keys to well-chosen fashion for both sexes: "The heavy suits of men are weighing them down in summer. . . . The heavily laden skirts of women greatly impede the free action of movement . . . [s]o also the headgear" (Georgen 142).

Of all the fashion items the corset came under the most direct and repeated attack. Throughout the 1890s Werner's Magazine was filled with charges against the corset. These articles usually proposed alternative outfits for increasingly active women. The author of one such article made clear that in her proposals for "rational dress" for women "all the objectionable features are done away with - straps, bands, and bones. Dressed in this way, one cannot fail to be comfortably dressed" (Werner's XIX.3.253). Yet the corset was such a longstanding institution in a woman's attire that even the most strident advocates for reform felt compelled to offer alternatives to the corsetless woman:

   Deep breathing is the first thing. Corsets must be consigned to the limbo of a superstitious age. It is useless to say that habit demands their continuance - it is a false idea. They must be supplanted by lightly-boned waists, which do not cramp any part of the body. Then the floor drill, with powerful breathing in perfect rhythm, will work its wonderful effects on the undeveloped organism" (DSOE 412-13).

Clearly Stebbins felt that Delsarte drill and the traditional corset were incompatible, and that natural breathing outweighed habit or fashion dictated by society.

Other Delsartians openly supported the use of the corset, yet urged reform in the most rigid and restrictive versions:

   We would be not understood to decry the corset, since there are few female
figures that can do without some support for the bust...A stout woman cannot
look otherwise than vulgar without a support for her figure, and a moderately
plump one certainly needs such support to give a symmetrical contour to the
waist. But above all things, wear a flexible corset that will not destroy the natural
curves; and wear it...in such a manner that it will not in any way interfere with the
actions of the body (Georgen 15).

Georgen focused special attention on her students’ classroom and exercise clothing,
urging them to wear non-restrictive clothing. Her simple uniform included blouses with
full sleeves and enough fabric to allow freedom of movement, a skirt, and the avoidance
of high heeled shoes (16).

Like many of their fellow teachers, the Thomas sisters, women who prided
themselves on their fashionable conservatory in Manhattan, urged that this war against
unnatural fashion be fought in the schoolroom as well as in the parlor room: “Fashion is
at odds with the principles of true beauty... the subject is so imperfectly comprehended
by the masses... The study of physical perfection - embracing proportion, symmetry,
simplicity, variety, grace, and strength, and its development - should be made a part of
the curriculum of every school” (228).

Yet in what appears at times to be an all-out crusade, these women were often
catched between attacking fashion and the status-seeking that restricts naturalness in
movement and having to establish their own fashionability and status to certify the value
of their own program. Even Stebbins courted status and promote her own “fashionable”
image when responding to a charge that statue posing produces affectation: “I reply from
extensive personal experience as teacher of many years in seven of the most fashionable schools in New York, and say that there is not one atom of truth in the charge" (my emphasis) (460). The most prominent women in the field, like Stebbins and Georgen, as well as the teachers in smaller conservatories like the Thomases, appear caught in the contradiction of courting status and fashionability while simultaneously advocating freedom from societal restrictions which were encouraged by the fashion plates and fashion makers of high society. Some of these reform-minded teachers seem to understand their contradictory existence, and an echo of their own lament can be heard in their determination that social standing can undermine individuality:

Expression is certainly a giving out of ourselves. . . . Conventionality teaches us to conceal or repress our feelings; so that, if our lives have always been conventional, it is much more difficult to learn to be expressive. It is undoubtedly a fact, although there is no real necessity for it, that the higher the social standing, the greater the tendency to entirely obliterate individuality, all being shaped by the same mould according to the dictates of fashion or the laws of etiquette. (Georgen 118)

Even the most liberated Delsartians failed to break free of this contradictory predicament. Their inability to do so suggests the powerful hold that Victorian social norms and fashion - in all of its forms - had on the women of this era. Equally impressive, however, is the strong pragmatic and progressive voice that occasionally emerges in their writings while they are forced to operate within the rules of fashion and status imposed by their culture. The hope of the most reform-minded Delsartians was, in part, to parlay their
status in an effort to build a community of like-minded advocates for naturalness and freedom, a community within which each member of society could develop to achieve her potential.

2.3 Delsartian Communities: Political, Social, and Artistic Ambitions

In her addendum to *Delsarte System of Expression*, entitled "A Glimpse at the Work of Genevieve Stebbins," Elsie Wilbor, editor of *Delsarte Recitation Book and Directory* (1890), presented the case for the political, social, and artistic ambitions of Delsartian women in unambiguous terms.

Women . . . need rousing. Why should men amuse themselves at the expense of the few women who, realizing their condition, strive to change it? Is it humorous to see a blind man groping his way through the streets? Let woman study philosophy, theosophy, moral law, or anything she will, so that she is taken outside of herself. She may make mistakes in the beginning; who does not? Mere fashion does not lead to spirituality, and the average fashionable woman resembles either a well-trained housemaid or a carefully-groomed horse. (480)

Ann Douglas has argued that by the late nineteenth-century, the home served as a prison for women, and that although their "influence" in the home suggested mobility, it actually masked the status of confined prisoner to which women were relegated (78-9). Douglas' assertions about sentimentalism and influence resonate with the frustrations voiced by Wilbor. In these circumstances, political statements such as Wilbor’s are easily recognized as a natural extension of the physical training offered by Delsartism; she voices the value of Delsartism as a political force and as a means to build community.
among progressive women. The existence of this community, whether it be for political, artistic, moral, or cultural purposes, is acknowledged by most Delsartian texts. The Thomases, as part of their intertwined physical and moral crusade, identify this community as well and acknowledge in their fellow women the power to bring about change, a power that exceeds Douglas' image of innocuous "influence." The Thomas sisters' most prominent acknowledgment of this community and its efficacy can be seen in their choice to dedicate their text to parents: "especially to mothers... teachers... the members of the W.C.T.U., who are bravely working for the abolition of the great evil which, more than anything else defiles, defaces, and deforms the temple" (iii.). The Thomases intimately connect the power of women with the body and with their desire to fight the evils that afflict the body. They also link this crusade to the scriptural reference for the body as temple. In these ways the Thomases not only define the community of their students and readers, but they also charge it with a purpose that is at once physical, moral, and political. Other authors of these instructional texts repeatedly make clear that their expected audience is predominantly composed of women. This can be seen in overt statements like Emily Bishop's claim that her exercises are intended for classes "usually composed of grandmothers, mothers, and daughters - with an occasional gentleman" (x). It can also be found in the use of pronouns. Georgen, for example, frequently eliminates the male pronoun in her instructions for Delsartian acting exercises in phrases such as "the student should endeavor to create for herself" (64). In this style of presentation, the sense of community appears even stronger than in Bishop's overt description, for the very reason that, from Georgen's perspective, an exclusively female orientation in her
writing does not require explanation or elaboration. Few professional instructional texts of this time would have been written by a female for a presumed female audience. Even more unconventional in her wording, Stebbins also uses the “assumed she” and, in several cases, goes beyond such wording to purposefully state an opposition between female Delsartians and their male counterparts in physical education:

Why are so many teachers of Delsarte ungraceful? . . . It is not because of a lack of knowledge, or a lack of ability in their special line. It is because they know so very little of anything else. The average Delsartian has been a bread-and-butter one, who has not studied the deeper and vital principles of her art. She has been wholly esthetic. The average physical culturalist, on the contrary, has been too profoundly scientific and athletic. He has ignored the Delsartian. The gymnastics instructor has become awkward, the esthetic Delsartian “has had no physical foundation on which to build his art” (my emphasis) (*DSOE* 415-16)²⁶

Scholars like Ruyter have also pointed out that in a performance context the instructors, performers, and the audience members were predominantly female (Ruyter, “Antique” 76). Martha Banta has examined one significant expression of this female community in the 1890 performance of *Antigone* staged by the Saturday Morning Club of Boston. Her conclusion, however, was that this production served as a means of diminishing women. Unfortunately, she comes to this conclusion primarily through the condescending writings of a few male reviewers about these women. Little evidence exists to probe the ambitions of the women in the performance and the audience. Within that community it may as likely have been an empowering event, rather than a mere showcase for
The community enjoined by Wilbor was formed by commonality of goals, nurtured by calls to action from Stebbins, Bishop, Georgen, and the other leaders of the field, and united by the many forces arrayed against the advancement of women in late nineteenth-century American society. Thomas defined these forces as barriers and fetters which link us to the barbarian past, one of the strongest of which is the belief existing among many prominent writers and leading men and women to-day, that women should be kept in ignorance of the physiology and anatomy of the human body, and the laws of her being. (10)

From such statements we can see that these women consciously aligned themselves with "progress," and they understood that knowledge and control of the body was a significant means of power in Victorian culture.

The writings of the Delsartians reveal that this community served as a point of intersection for multiple groups. Some of these groups were more politically-minded and gender-conscious than others, but all of them were seeking a means to self-improvement. These writings also reveal that these groups relied on education about the body as a means to power and identity, and that physical education in the Delsartian model became intermingled with status; for some it was a means to maintain status, and for others it was a means of upward mobility. Many of these groups could be found in a single classroom, as was the case with a typical class of Stebbins. In reflecting upon Stebbins’ classes, Elsie Wilbor claimed “there is a niche for everybody - the young and the old; the rich and the poor; the fanatic and the tyro; the simple searcher for health and grace and the
logician who demands a reason for the name of God” (DSOE 475). Such openness of thought was countered by the reality that classes were primarily attended by middle class women. In Wilbor’s profile, Stebbins’ daily schedule included a class for children, followed by an “intermediate class in young ladies’ seminary,” then a “philosophical class of middle aged ladies,” and concluded with a “nerve gymnastics class of middle-aged ladies in NY studio apt” (Stebbins 475-86). Within a circumscribed population of women, Delsartians embraced a relatively wide range of ages, lifestyles, and philosophical orientations.

One of the most valuable means for enhancing this nascent community of women was the educational system, and the most socially conscious Delsartians realized this. Delsartism had always been seen as a means to train artists, and was expanded by many - some more politically oriented than others - to become a teaching tool for non-artists and a means to better living. Indeed, Delsartism in America was often more prominent, more firmly established, and perhaps ultimately more effective in the classroom than anywhere else. Many socially-conscious Delsartians, such as the Thomas sisters, found the educational system of the late nineteenth-century to be thoroughly inadequate and harmful to the health of the nation. In their instructional texts, they lament the “almost total neglect of physical education of our youth in the home and school” (Thomas 3). The proof, they claim, “is seen in the wide-spreading and alarming evils which are choking and stifling our social, political, and religious growth today” (3).

In order to counter these conditions, they argue that American education should be designed to produce “the most perfect types of cultured and self-governed men and
women" (Thomas 120). To make this argument, they 1) link the concepts of culture and self-governance, 2) articulate the benefits for both women and men, and 3) place education at the core of their reformist effort. This broad vision of Delsartism as social reform, couched in populist terms and advocated through America’s emerging compulsory educational system, complicates the one-dimensional picture of the role of class and status in American Delsartism that is drawn by Banta and most historians of the period. In particular, Banta’s consideration of the social implications for Delsartism is limited by her almost exclusive focus upon high society tableaux entertainments, which she describes as “by and large politically conservative and socially static” (653).

Banta’s argument that Delsartism in America served primarily to reinforce the social status quo, and that the “blue bloods” used tableaux to show their ties to the country’s “aristocratic” history” (652-53) relies primarily upon her examination of Mrs. E.M.W. Sherwood’s 1893 text The Art of Entertaining. From this examination Banta concludes that “tableaux gave high society the best opportunity for expressing its belief in the heroic, the refined, and the historic.” (Banta 652) However true this argument may be for the “high society” Banta profiles, it denies the overtly political statements of Stebbins, Wilbor, Bishop, and other Delsartian leaders, and it ignores the wider social and cultural applications of Delsartism articulated by Warman, Georgen, the Thomas sisters, and many of the frequent contributors to Werner’s Magazine. Rather than merely affirming and maintaining a static social order, Delsartism served the dual and frequently contradictory purpose of maintaining status gradations for some, and providing hope for upward mobility for others - both women and men. Careful attention to the rules of
Delsartism offered the potential to attain status where it might not otherwise be available. Warman follows his claim that "the greater the freedom of the joints, the more cultured the individual" (35) with exercises designed to allow "nervous force" to flow through the body unimpeded, thus providing the freedom of the joints that the cultured individual requires.

If Stebbins' writing are a reliable guide, the connections between Delsartian physical training and social mobility can be traced to Delsarte himself, to whom Stebbins attributes a number of statements connecting social status with physical status: "Delsarte goes on to state that people of the higher classes have a gamut of expression subtler than that of the lower. . . . There must be a difference between 'the swift and flexible movements of an elegant organism and those evolutions clumsily executed by the torpid limbs hardened by constant labor'" (DSOE 124). Here, perhaps in its most clearly articulated form, we see the uniquely American intermingling of social acceptance and social reform within Delsartism. In this statement Delsarte emphasized class distinctions that were static, with no reference to mobility. However, in the American community of Delsartians, which had always been more intent upon practical application than philosophy, this became not merely a means to identify class status, but rather a means to instill, to teach, to "engender" high class attributes. For such a change of thought to occur, the culture would have to admit that a physical system can transform the entire individual. Always limiting this potential for mobility, however, is Delsartism's usefulness in reinforcing arbitrary measures of social propriety and social acceptance. acceptance of
The promise of transformation goes hand in hand with the Delsartians' beliefs that an individual can be judged by his or her appearance. Potentially altering this appearance would raise your value to God, nature, and society, but what of those whose appearance included "undesirable" qualities that could not be altered? Delsartism offered little hope for these individuals, usually non-white, and recently arrived in America. In this context, Delsartism's influence in America was not a progressive force, but rather a reactionary, xenophobic phenomenon. Robert Wiebe argues that a preoccupation with purity and unity was part of the larger reaction to the dissolution of the island community in late nineteenth-century American life. American Delsartism possessed the power to transform the individual into an impersonal piece of clay, to be molded in appearance and thinking, but it could also depersonalize the individual in the worst way. It relied upon one's sometimes unalterable outward appearance as a measure of his or her character, it lifted this sentiment to the false status of a science, and it fueled the existent racism and fears within a population beset by massive change it was ill-equipped to face. The dual nature of Delsartian impersonality - as promise and prison - is the phenomenon to which this investigation now turns.

ENDNOTES

1. James credited Charles Sanders Peirce with the original articulation of Pragmatism. James cited an 1878 essay by Peirce as the source of this initial statement of the Pragmatic approach to philosophy, but claimed that the essay had been largely ignored in the subsequent two decades.
2. James' writings on Pragmatism, Radical Empiricism, and a host of subjects from late nineteenth-century American life and thought are massive in scope and monumental in their contribution to philosophic inquiry. In his study of James Bernard Brennan, echoing the sentiments of Bergson, Santayana, and many of James' contemporaries, cautions that Pragmatism as outlined by James can be easily over-simplified and misinterpreted. Brennan rejects equating an idea's Pragmatic value and its practical consequences. Instead, he argues that "pragmatism means that concepts should be reduced to their positive experiencable operations." For a fuller explication of this concept see Chapter 3 of Brennan's *William James* (1968) and James' *The Meaning of Truth* (1911), pp. x-xi.


4. The Delsartians' advocacy of "Practical Delsartism" is examined at length in Chapter 4 as part of the effort of these women to project a professional image for this movement.

5. A distinction should be made here between "sentiment" as the Delsartians often used the term and "sentimental," a term modern scholars frequently apply to the Victorian period. As will be illustrated in this section, scholars have typically used the terms "sentimental" and "sentimentalism" as derogatory labels. Social historians and cultural historians such as Ann Douglas argue that sentimentalism removed women from the means to power in nineteenth-century society. Theatre scholars and literary scholars discuss the sentimental aspects of nineteenth-century plays and novels primarily as a means to distinguish them from later, more sophisticated, modernist counterparts. Delsartians themselves often used "sentiment" as a concrete noun rather than as an adjective or a label. Sentiment was many things for Delsartians, but it usually implied an activity or a commodity that aided them in their teaching, performance, or other professional activities. Flowery language and other signs of sentimentalism can frequently be found in the Delsartian texts and the pages of Werner's, but the clear dividing line between sentimental and practical is one largely imposed by modern observers. It would have seemed unremarkable to the Delsartians themselves and to many of their contemporaries.

6. "Influence" is a crucial term in Douglas' analysis. She argues that both the nineteenth-century cleric and woman substituted influence for true power. By seeking "influence," according to Douglas, these groups were "asking for nothing more than offhand attention, and not even much of that: 'influence' was to be discreetly omnipresent and omnipotent . . . unobtrusive and everywhere at the same time" (9). See also Douglas' excellent discussion of the relationship between the "influence" and "invisibility" of
women on pages 45-46.

7. Such a statement may not be quite as frivolous as the sentimentalized wording suggests. If we consider the many eastern movement regimens that teach forms inspired by the movements of animals or if we study the naturally occurring motions which form the basis for many exercises in Rudolf Laban's teachings, such as the scatter and gather movements, then we quickly realize that sentimentalized appearances can serve the most pragmatic systems. See Laban's *Mastery of Movement*, 3rd ed. (1971) pp. 91-93.

8. Stebbins offers a clarification of this statement by Delsarte: "The word passion here seems to signify impulse, excitement, vehemence." She concludes that "Sentiment and passion, then, proceed in an inverse way" (309).

9. Historians seeking to clarify gender relations must guard against reading too much into such a statement. After all, Warman's role of advisor to women and all Delsartians is a role that other writers of these instructional texts took upon themselves as well, and indeed is a somewhat natural role for one who claims to be a teacher in this female-dominated arena. Also, many of these male and female instructors or commentators, including Stebbins, Bishop, the Thomas sisters, and Steele and Percy MacKaye tend to write in the same grandiose, all-encompassing narrative style of the era, a tendency furthered by the religious zeal and missionary posture behind their claims. Nevertheless, in this instance Warman deliberately draws the reader's attention to the gender divide and the power of women in this movement.


11. Again, modern theatre scholars can potentially misread this as pure sentiment and therefore of little practical value. However, Bishop's section on Sleeping Exercises is a reaction to the stresses of modern American life that Wiebe and Trachtenberg identify. Earlier in her text she cautions that "Overwrought, nervous Americans have special need to learn 'the gospel of relaxation'" (60). Furthermore, students of Stanislavski realize that he, too, was driven to find a relaxed state in the artificial environment of performance, and he developed his techniques largely to aid the performer in this regard.

12. To be sure, the image of natural man and man as child of nature have a rich heritage in nineteenth-century Romanticism. Stebbins uses this image in her chapter "Genesis of Pantomimic Expression" to present an origins theory for the system:

> Primitive man, like a child, reached for that which he desired, and drew back from that which he feared. . . . When he lifted his arm and brought it down, it crushed what was weaker and so became later the gesture of dominance, of assertion, of the yes. Stone cut to fell a tree became "the great no - the negative (DSOE 367-68).
Her ability to connect this to modern elocution illustrates her ability to find connections in all things, and to relate all things back to her totaling system:

And to-day our grandest orators use in the expression of sublime emotion but the same motions that he primitive savage evolved as pantomime to express the first simple necessities of his nature. That they are true to-day is because the mental, moral and vital natures correspond. In these few paragraphs is given the entire genesis of pantomimic expression (DSOE 369).

13. In fact, the child image is repeatedly used in modern training texts and systems, as a model for the performer's physical development and for more efficient use of the body. For example, Irmgard Bartenieff, one of the most influential American practitioners of Laban's theories, repeatedly instructs her students to observe children in her text *Body Movement: Coping With the Environment* (1980). Moshe Feldenkrais developed his system of movement, which is becoming increasingly popular in actor training, around the natural movements of children (see Feldenkrais' *Awareness Through Movement, Health Exercises for Personal Growth*, 1972).

14. This phenomenon reinforces the religious fervor of many of the Delsartians, but it is also not far removed from the holistic nature of many modern movement regimens. Just as the Delsartian was taught to look for trinities and examine his or her breathing in all activities, the modern student of Alexander is encouraged to seek efficient movement and healthful alignment in all aspects of his or her activities, or the student of Laban is instructed to look for effort elements, drives or states in all human activities. For one of the most articulate discussions of applications for Rudolf Laban's work to myriad aspects of human activities, see Irmgard Bartenieff and Dori Lewis' *Body Movement: Coping With the Environment* (viii-x, xii-xiv).

15. In 1877 English psychologist G.H. Lewes offered a similar statement in his assessment of emotion in animals and humans: "It is the man and not the brain that thinks; it is the organism as a whole, and not one organ that feels and acts" (qtd. in Roach 183).

16. These range from the classic Hapgood translations of Stanislavski to more faddish texts of the past ten years, such as 1996 Jeremy Whelan's *New School Acting*, and more theory-driven texts such as Richard Hornby's *The End of Acting*.

17. *Feminization of American Culture*, 51. Douglas links this removal of women to the "disestablishment" of women in the late nineteenth-century, which included the loss of significant privileges for women and their removal from productive cultural and commercial activities.

18. For an extensive discussion of the contradictions inherent in the Victorian medical community's perceptions of and treatment for women, see Lorna Duffin's "The Conspicuous Consumptive: Woman as an Invalid," *The Nineteenth Century Woman*
19. The concept of "grace," which Martha Banta uses to relegate the efforts of Delsartians to the margins of political discourse in late nineteenth-century America, is presented here as a significant part of this crucial mental-physical connection and is tied to a fairly simple, practical physical instruction for students of Delsartism. The empowering function of Grace will be discussed at greater length in section 3.6.

20. Stebbins’ frequent discussions of “signs” opens an additional forum for debate: that of semiotics and correspondence of signs. While questions regarding different perceptions of the body and how the body as static or mutable sign are present throughout this study, my primary focus has been on how these training texts and American Delsartism led to practical applications in the late nineteenth-century and formed a model for subsequent movement work in the twentieth-century. Of course, semiotic considerations of the body as sign and how the body is perceived is inherently political, and therefore of legitimate concern here, but there is simply not enough room in this study to give this phenomenon its due.

21. In addition to her extensive discussion of breathing in Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics, Stebbins offers a commentary on breathing as an integral part of her teachings in The Delsarte System of Expression. For Stebbins’ attention to breathing in this text, see especially pages 408-413. Her arguments for natural breathing and the importance of breathing in one’s ability to control one’s own body sound remarkably similar to those found in actor training regimens of the late twentieth-century, including the work of Tadashi Suzuki and Susanna Bloch’s work in Alba Emoting. [add quote from Theatre Topics article].

22. Hypnosis is used by Stebbins as an analogy in Breathing (74) as well. An excellent recent examination of the fascination with hypnosis in the late nineteenth-century can be found in W.D. King’s “‘Shadow of a Mesmeriser’: The Female Body on the ‘Dark’ Stage,” Theatre Journal 49 (1997) 189-206. A key distinction can be made between King’s examination of this phenomenon and the references made to it by Stebbins. King examines the typical model in which a male manipulator “works over” a female subject. In Stebbins’ argument, once the analogy to the mesmerist is made, she removes the controlling male figure from the equation and focuses instead upon the student (almost always a woman in her classes) who is under her own conscious manipulation.

23. Photographs of the two sisters are featured in the opening pages of Thomas Psycho-Physical Culture.

24. Stebbins appears, here and elsewhere, to use spirituality as a selling point for the system in an age when the society at large paid great attention to morality and the appearance of morality. Even in this context, however, she is more likely to equate “spiritual” with “noble” rather than tie it to any specifically Christian context.
25. Stebbins conceives of breath a cosmic force as well as a physiological product. This cosmic significance enhances its power to affect morality and to shape character choice. Ultimately breath can bring about or abet a state of mind for the individual and the character. See Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics.

26. In addition to her modern gender bending, Stebbins presents the modern concept of physical conditioning for the performing artist, a concept at the root of Stanislavski’s training approach. See especially Chapters 4 and 5 of Stanislavski’s Building a Character.

27. Banta’s discussion of this women’s club’s production of Antigone can be found on pages 655-62 of Imaging American Women.

28. A parallel can be drawn to the schools that prepared gentlemen in Shakespeare’s time. Often the ability to dance and to comply to the standards of social customs were measures of social status, and this knowledge became a means for social mobility for the most successful members of the new merchant class. For additional consideration of this phenomenon, see James P. Cunningham’s Dancing in the Inns of Court (1965), Alan Brissenden’s Shakespeare and the Dance (1981), and Mary Virginia Pyron’s unpublished Ph.D. dissertation “‘Sundry Measures’: Dance in Renaissance Comedy” (1987).
CHAPTER 3

DELSARTIANS AS IMPERSONAL CREATIONS

In *The Player's Passion*, Joseph Roach, evoking the image of Proteus, a water spirit who could change shape at will, argues for the transformative and thus disruptive power attributed to actors throughout most of Western history (41). Nowhere does this protean ability to change shapes and character at will emerge more strongly than in Roach's treatment of Denis Diderot and David Garrick. For Roach, Diderot serves as the linchpin and hero of his story, a scholar-artist who frames the modern age's understanding of acting and the theatre.² Roach connects these two men most visibly by recounting a parlor trick that was the talk of Paris in Diderot's day. After the Paris visit of David Garrick in 1763-64, Garrick's ability to manipulate his face through a series of expressions in rapid succession and the effect of this exercise upon his audience thoroughly impressed Diderot and influenced his determination that mechanics and technique outweigh sheer inspiration in the actor's work:

Garrick's facial manipulations emerged again a century later. In 1892 Marie Geraldy, François Delsarte's daughter, offered her advice to American students of her father's work:
My father always used to say to his pupils: "Be warm outwardly, cold inwardly." He wanted them to pass suddenly from one great emotion to another. All the great actors do so. He would point to a portrait of Garrick, representing the great actor with one-half of his face laughing, the other half weeping. He himself, in his lessons, after having given expression to some pathetic sentiment, would become immediately his own kind self again. He insisted on self-possession (qtd. in Zorn 119).³

The link being made here is a critical one. For a woman in Geraldy's audience to seek "possession of self" was no easy feat. She would have to overcome powerful strictures of a Victorian culture that inscribed her body with the markings of male possession. These markings included physical constraints such as the corset, and behavioral constraints such as narrow prescriptions for reading material and acceptable decorum. The same transformative power that fascinated Diderot and Delsarte shaped the performance forms of Second and Third Stage American Delsartism into a means to gain some degree of self-possession. This was particularly evident in the most distinctive Delsartian performance form: statue posing.

Statue posing took many forms in the three decades of greatest popularity for Delsartism. The impersonation of statues was not restricted to Delsartians, but it was the activity most readily identified with their work. Statue impersonation, usually of Greek models, became a Delsartian activity for public performance as well as private recreation. Ladies clubs, parlor rooms, and Delsarte studios were the favorite locations for these activities, but there was also an active professional circuit for posers like Genevieve
Stebbins. Posings also offered the opportunity for teachers to display the work of their students. Typically posings were presented as part of a larger program of recitals, drills, and music. An observer for *Werner's Magazine* recorded the program for a performance by Genevieve Stebbins on April 24, 1895 in New York’s Carnegie Recital Hall:

Overture, by the orchestra.

Address, “Psycho-physical culture;” illustrated by Flower Drill and Amazon Drill

Recitation, “Guinevere,” ..........Tennyson

Artistic Physical Culture; illustrated by statue-impersonations of Diana

Discovering Endymion, Ceres, Augustus, Cupid with Bow, Apollo Belvedere, laughing Faun, Venus Dressing Her hair, Amazon, Quoit Player, Daphne, Dying Gladiator, Hebe.

Music by orchestra.

Recitation, “The Rhyme of the Duchess May,” ....................Browning

Festival of Pallas Athene.

The Myth of Isis, in Three Scenes: (I) Chaos; the Birth of Nature; (2) Life and Death; (3) Resurrection and Immortality. (*Werner's* XVII, No.5, 388)

The Werner’s writer concluded from Stebbins’ performance that “she reached the height of perfection in bodily control — that control that is dominated by the mind — that only years of work with an exceptionally well-strung instrument could produce” (388).

The reviewer’s objectivity in this assessment is not nearly as important as the language he or she chooses to describe the performer’s accomplishment; “control,” “years of work,” and “well-strung instrument” all connote a sense of power achieved
through great effort. Stebbins' control of body and fostered a sense of self possession centered on the expressive use of the woman's body. Instructions for statue posers repeatedly encourage a greater control of one's own body. Coupled with this emphasis on self-control, continuous transformations on stage allowed these female performers to present a fluidity of identity that challenged Victorian efforts to contain the female image. Ironically, this challenge was limited by posers' view of themselves as empty vessels into which could be poured a universal, idealized image of beauty. In this way the Delsartian performer ceased to think of herself as an individual on stage; she became instead an impersonal creation.

This impersonal creation was shaped by a convergence of a static idealism inherent in Delsartism and a fluid bureaucratic orientation emerging in American society. On stage this led to a performance form that seems to liberate the image of women, but does so at the risk of denying a tangible, corporeal recipient for this liberating energy. I will explore the interplay between idealism and the bureaucratic orientation in Delsartian performance by seeking out the traces of a camouflaged feminism in the seemingly conservative and domestic nature of statue posing (Section 3.1). I will then consider the liberating elements of one of the most specific models of this performance, the model Stebbins' articulated for her self-styled "Artistic Statue Posing," (Section 3.2). I will subsequently illustrate how this performance form was based upon a static, traditional idealism that subsumed the poser's individuality into a universal ideal (Section 3.3). I will then link Delsartian performance and its idealized subject to a fluid and ultimately unknowable identity for women. These aspects of the poser's identity disrupted
Victorian containment of women’s identities, but the act of performing was, at best, an elusive means of empowerment for Victorian women (Section 3.4). Ultimately I conclude that these performances imparted power to a fluid, unknowable, intangible image of woman. Women could then incorporate that power into concrete social or political advancement only by moving beyond the performative context and into professional, social, and domestic spheres.

3.1 A Framework for Statue Posing

Judging from the writings of Delsartian teachers, the self-control Marie Geraldy advocated was clearly an objective of many of the students of Delsartism. In Americanized Delsarte Culture Emily Bishop recalled asking her classes why they were taking her Delsarte-based course in “Health and Grace.” Bishop recounted several of the answers, including their desires to cure insomnia, to avoid exhaustion, and to overcome nervousness. Most keenly, one woman confessed: “I want to get possession of myself. My body is a real incumbrance, I never know what to do with it” (31). Bishop openly tied her own instructional philosophy and techniques to a liberation for women: “When by self-knowledge and self discipline, women gain habitual, easy control of their bodies, . . . they will have achieved an important emancipation” (35). This political philosophy finds its way into even the most esoteric or artistic exercises in her text and the texts of many of her colleagues.4 Of these exercises, the ones that most closely associate issues of emancipation with performance are exercises in statue posing.

This performance form was not practiced by all Delsartians, and it assumed different names and different conventions under different instructors. Labeled “posing,”
statue posing," and "artistic statue posing" by various instructors, statue posing was unique to Second and Third Stage American Delsartism. While the phenomenon has received attention in only a few published studies, most notably Banta's *Imaging American Women*, (particularly Chapter 15: "The Purchase of Grace") and Ruyter's essay "Antique Longings" printed in *Corporealities*, it was the art form most widely identified with the women advocates of American Delsartism. Genevieve Stebbins' explanation for the multiple names for this performance form suggests that even the label of the medium promotes a dialogue of power and submerged potential:

Some years ago, when a species of statue posing departing widely from classic art began to be taught in various parts of the country, I prefixed the word "artistic" to the words "statue posing," to distinguish classic ideals from ordinary statue-impersonation and tableaux mouvants. Artistic statue posing, in the sense I use the words, means embodiment and careful following out, as far as human things can, of the divine ideal in high art . . . this conception rests entirely on the works of classic masters. . . . The difference between "statue posing" and "artistic statue posing" is that the former conveys the expression of human thought and emotion, while the latter conveys, or ought to convey, the idea of absolute calm and repose of an immortal soul, possessing infinite capacity for expression, but at the same time giving no definite expression except that of capacity and power in reserve. . . (DSOE 444-45) (my emphasis)

The statement that artistic statue posing holds "capacity and power in reserve" implies an unleashing of that power at a later time and an understanding of the strength that is
inherent in the potential to act. According to Nina Auerbach, such an understanding of women’s potential, specifically their disruptive potential, illuminates the means employed by a patriarchal Victorian culture to contain and control women’s identities. It also exposes the hidden resistance of women to that control.

In her studies of Victorian narrative, Auerbach has argued that the transformative power of women characters in literature and theatre, along with the subversive power ascribed to women to metamorphose within and between characters, made these women especially disruptive. Along the lines of argument followed by Jonas Barish in The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice and Joseph Roach in The Player’s Passion, this assessment allows actors and statue posers to assume a unique position of power in Victorian culture, especially when these actors and posers are women. Auerbach sees the transformative presence of women as part of the literary structure of Victorian drama, arguing that Victorian plays were often most memorable for their shifting images and transformations (“Revelations” 20). But its strongest presence can be seen in the individuals who undergo the act of transformation witnessed by an audience. In this capacity, Victorian actors are likened to ghosts:

Actors and ghosts both appear as unnatural impositions on authentic being. But underneath their assurance that they know who they are, Victorian humanists fear that the disobedient energies of the actor and ghost manifest truer, if trickier, “own selves” than the authorized cycle of life accommodates. (Private Theatricals 18)

In the case of the Delsartian statue posers this image of the ghostly actor functions
alongside the disruptive image of the Victorian woman. While the restrictions of Victorian culture would seem to indicate women's relative weakness, Auerbach takes a different view, arguing that "[t]he social restrictions that crippled women's lives, the physical weakness wished upon them, were fearful attempts to exorcize a mysterious strength" (*Woman and the Demon* 8). Ultimately, she sees these restrictions as producing unintended consequences: "Victorian taboos had furtively empowered women by endowing them with a sense of their dangerous potential" (*Woman and the Demon* 223). This results in a schizophrenic image of women and a fear of their transformative power:

> While right-thinking Victorians were elevating woman to an angel, their art slithered with images of a mermaid . . . a creature of transformations and mysterious interrelations, able to kill and to regenerate but not to die, unfurling in secret her powers of mysterious, pre-Christian, pre-human dispensation. (*Woman and the Demon* 19).

One can find similar patterns of restriction and subversion in the assessments of Ann Douglas and Martha Banta. In her assessment of the "disestablishment" of American women Douglas illustrates the detrimental effects of the removal of women from meaningful commerce in the nineteenth-century family and the larger society.⁶ According to Douglas, middle class women were relegated to the status of superfluous commodities for their husbands through the substitution of benign "influence" for any meaningful control over their own lives. Similarly, Banta offers a picture of late nineteenth-century America in which women are elevated to the status of iconic image, knowable to all but lacking corporeality. Neither scholar attributes to these women the
disruptive potential that Auerbach does, but Auerbach’s critique serves not as a refutation of their assessments but a supplement. All three scholars take on the issue of Victorian restrictiveness, and each acknowledges that a society would only struggle to contain something that it viewed as potentially disruptive. Delsartian performers’ ability to stretch and reshape the containers for women’s identity - both physically and philosophically - offered them the opportunity to exert considerable subversive power.

As purveyors of potentially disruptive images of women, the Delsartian statue posers were well positioned within a cultural nexus of actors, images, and transformations. Their art form was most popular in the 1890s, the decade cultural historians have identified as a crucial time of crisis and transition in American history, and the decade in which Auerbach claims the myths that defined Victorian characterizations of women were most common in popular literature and theatre (Auerbach, Women and the Demon, 15). These Delsartians were engaging in a form of artistic expression dominated by women, to the near exclusion of men. They dealt with images that were as fixed in the minds of their spectators as the statues they studied, yet they moved through these images to the delight of their fellow women and a few men in the audience. In turn these idealized images allowed these performers to fleetingly inhabit grandiose identities. These idealized identities dwarfed women’s daily, circumscribed existence. To clarify the nature of this act of transcendence, Auerbach’s intertwining of literary character types and the image of Victorian women is useful:

The very rigidity of the categories of victim and queen, domestic angel and demonic outcast, old maid and fallen woman, concentrates itself into a myth of
transfiguration that glorified the woman it seemed to suppress. . . . [H]er grand incarnation in character types enables her to incarnate character itself, the nineteenth-century’s most potent vision of humanity made perpetual. (Woman and the Demon 9).

To examine statue posing, we may adapt the literary characters of Auerbach’s analysis to the statue posers’ universalized figures from ancient mythology or their idealized personifications of emotional states from Delsarte’s System of Applied Aesthetics. Statue posing granted to these American women the power to embody perpetual characters or qualities and to move between them to experience multiple identities. Stebbins’ students could be Athena, then become Diana (see Figure 3.1), while Eleanor Georgen’s students could embody “Wisdom,” then transform to “Repulsion” (see Figure 3.2). Ironically, social taboos and restrictions on Victorian femininity can be seen as both the source of and a response to such displays of the fluid identities of women.

To be sure, this transformative - and potentially dangerous - power was attached to the theatrical activities of both men and women for centuries, as Barish, Roach, and a score of other scholars have argued, but in the late nineteenth-century it was amplified by Victorians’ fear of the fluidity of identity. Auerbach argues this fear was a response to the sense of the infinite that encroached upon the previous safety and centrality of the human being. Geologic time and Darwinian evolution served to demote the human being and made his affairs of far less cosmic significance than they had been at the beginning of the century. As a result, the personal was granted disproportional significance by Victorians “who had nothing to believe in but their lives,” and individual lives became
DIANA SHOOTING WITH A BOW.
(National Museum, Naples.)

Figure 3.1. Statue of Diana. From Genevieve Stebbins' *The Delsarte System of Expression*, 6th ed. (1902).
REPULSION.

Figure 3.2. "Repulsion." From Eleanor Georgen's *The Delsartian System of Physical Culture* (1893).
Within this post-Darwinian context, in which Victorians were reacting to their new-found insignificance, the individual, represented by the “character” in literature and theatre, was one of the few unchanging facts that could be relied upon by “reverent Victorians.” These bearers of a besieged standard “shunned theatricality as the ultimate, deceitful mobility. It connotes not only lies, but a fluidity of character that decomposes the uniform integrity of the self” (Woman and the Demon 4). Auerbach reminds us that it is easy to dismiss the power vested in theatricality when modern writers and critics equate being theatrical with being “safely fake.” She counters this modern interpretation by claiming that “such reassuring signals appropriate the surface of theatre while shunning its essence: a fluidity, an energy that can infect an audience” (“Revelations” 19). Inquiries into the fluidity of the theatrical experience have a rich history. The fluid boundary between audience and performer, unparalleled in the literature forum, was frequently used to cast the theatre as a source of pollution. For centuries the performer was thought of in fluid terms, as an infectious organism or a being that generates a wave of physical force to influence the spirits of others. Questions of fluidity were also at the heart of acting theory in the late nineteenth-century, as the great minds of the theatre sought to understand the essentially fluid boundary between inspiration and technique.

In contrast to Auerbach’s examination of fluidity in performance and in Victorian literature, Martha Banta focuses on the relationship between multiple static images of women. In Imaging American Women she offers valuable insights into the variations of women’s identities in the visual arts. Most frequently she draws these visual images
from the periodicals of the era. Her examination of the "astonishing frequency" with which the American image is cast in female form during this period provides a broad context for Delsartian depictions of women. Beyond the limited spheres of artistry, hygiene, and parlor room entertainments, Delsartian depictions gave visual form to political hopes and competing images of American national identity (xxxi). While Banta devotes much of her impressive study to designating the most frequently used "types" of images of women, one of her primary arguments is akin to Auerbach's concern for the fluidity of women's identities in literature. As she focuses on the efforts of patriarchal institutions to contain women's identities into knowable images and safe forms, Banta argues that the "ability of these types to flow past their containers into paradox and ambiguity makes them important as cultural artifacts" (88). One of the most complex representations of this paradoxical and ambiguous woman can be found in Delsartian statue posing. If we couple Auerbach's investigations of the power inherent in nineteenth-century woman's potential to transform with Martha Banta's recognition of the significance of visual images that flow past the containers of women's identity, we have a preliminary basis for considering the disruptive potential of this Delsartian performance mode.

3.2 Transgression Through Artistic Statue Posing

Transgression of the domestic ideal seems unlikely in the ultra-domestic context of Delsartian women. Indeed, the few scholars who have studied these women have concluded that the statue posers' "[p]hysical and expressive activities . . . did not . . . transgress the traditional bounds of gentility and propriety." ("Antique Longings" 72).
On the surface this assessment is accurate. But when one considers Victorian culture as a whole and realizes the restrictive position of women, one begins to realize that any transformation from a tightly circumscribed, fixed, subservient identity would have potential transgressive value. This is the political element within Banta’s argument; the ability of these women’s identities to overflow their containers gives to them an important power in this culture. The appearance of sentimentalism and domesticity can lead one to conclude that no subversive potential existed within Delsartian performance, but such an assessment denies the reformer’s need to dress progressive (and therefore subversive) activities in conservative clothing. This camouflaged feminism has been explored by Sara Delamont in regards to education reform. Delamont has argued “It was only by continuing to glorify the Victorian domestic ideal, as the education pioneers all did, that any educational progress could be made. . . . Women’s education could only progress if the family was not threatened” (“The Domestic Ideology and Women’s Education” 184). By the same token, any subversive potential in statue posing was couched in terms of domesticity and conformity, a fact that many of the posers’ performance scenarios confirm. But while the poses were conformist in their overall appearance, the physical training and self-control encouraged by posing, and the visibility of women moving through multiple identities allowed subversive potential to exist within the art form. Two aspects of Stebbins’ version of statue posing granted license to its female practitioners: 1) its “Greekness”, and 2) its self-proclaimed stature as “artistry.”

To distinguish her style of performance as “artistic” statue posing, Stebbins
focused upon its foundations in Greek, and to a lesser extent, Roman art. She also 
argued for the higher artistic purpose, means, and commitment embodied in her vision of 
statue posing. In addition to her genuine reverence for the Greek model of life and art, 
Stebbins’ effort to connect her artistic style and training system to Greek and Roman art 
served as a means to legitimate the Delsartian system in late nineteenth-century America. 
Greek culture was embraced in all things, and found expression in popular culture as well 
as elite society. It inspired many modern pioneers in the arts including Jig Cook, Ruth 
St. Denis, Ted Shawn, and Isadora Duncan. Knowledge of Greek culture, language, and 
forms became the measure of one’s cultural sophistication. Women’s colleges such as 
Smith instituted a compulsory knowledge of Greek as an entrance requirement, in large 
part to appear as rigorous as the best men’s colleges (Delamont, “Contradictions” 155). 
Under the appearance of a Greek tradition statue posing could be seen as a legitimate 
artistic and educational endeavor with a cultural heritage centuries old. 

The "Greekness" of artistic statue posing connected this form of expression to the 
revival of ancient forms in arts, architecture, and popular culture, but it also allowed a 
certain license to these women that otherwise might not have been available. First, 
Ruyter points out that pupils studying under Stebbins and Clara Power Edgerly, the 
second most popular poser, all wore the same “Greekish” costume whether they 
represented women or men (“Antique Longings” 81). Even beyond the concurrent 
popularity of breeches parts, by posing the idealized identities of both men and women 
these posers could, through performance, breach the containment of their feminine 
identity. The sheer ordinariness of these women makes their potential to perform
multiple identities that much more remarkable. Most were not professional actors, rather
the performances were given mainly by white, middle-class ‘ladies’ and their students
(Ruyter, “Antique Longings” 72). One would not think that the conventionality of the
posers would accommodate a performance form in which “it was nearly always the
female body that was representing, although both male and female bodies might be
represented” (Ruyter, “Antique Longings” 72). How these women squared a daily
existence in which gender was paramount and a performance style in which gender was
nullified is one of the many paradoxes of this system in its social context.

The gender invisibility of the women in statue posing was abetted by the Greek
motif of most statue posing. Portrayal of idealized characters from Greek mythology
allowed these performers to personify a wider variety of characters than would be open
to women in the traditional theatre. In an example from one of the more conservative
instructional texts, the Thomas sisters spell out the attributes of various Greek models
they encourage their students to study. Each example illustrates the particular beauty of
different Greek models or attributes. The Venus DeMilo is “vital, because it embodies
all the qualities which best fit a woman to become the mother of her race.” While the
Hunting Diana is “locomotive” and highlights the “activity of movement.” Minerva
Athene best represents the “intellectual, because it develops particularly the intellectual
excellence of form and expression” (Thomas 230). Not only were the Thomases’
students given a model to emulate that was likely to be beyond their personal experience,
they were given multiple models for their behavior, and thus exposed to a variety of
possibilities for expanding their concept of self.

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By modeling her work on Greek culture, Stebbins was able to achieve some level of freedom for her female students as well. This freedom came not only from gender ambiguity within portrayals of characters and types, but also from her efforts to connect their posings to a grander scheme. In this capacity, she used Greek subject matter as a means of liberation: "To me the myths of Greece are not only fairy stories of evolution . . . but they are also the grand old parables which tell us of the godlike powers and principles embodied within the human soul" (DSOE 422). This applied not only in her own work, but in her role as a guide to teachers. She exhorted her teachers to use "the immortals' as the Greek statues are justly called" as their guide (DSOE 422). These teachers, like the Thomas sisters, were encouraged to develop studies of Greek sculpture with their students. The characters they recreated from Greek myths were warriors, lovers, hunters - figures of action and motion. By posing, these women used their bodies as the medium for the art they created. Their unique position as creator and creation allowed their bodies, as sites of representation, to be a source of power for their work as artists. Self-control of the body, a goal repeatedly encouraged by Delsartian instructors, granted posers freedom as women and artists. A similar power Auerbach ascribes to nineteenth-century character due largely to an "ecstatic and defiant self-transfiguration in the absence of a transfiguring creator" (Woman and the Demon 228). Greek models were ideally suited to this heightened level of autonomy; if not altogether absent, then the Greek sculptors were at least very far away. The statue poser in this environment potentially held a great deal of power; guided by the "laws" of the idealized form she served as a marionette that manipulates its own strings.
The power Stebbins reserved for "artistry" and for the artist is a common theme running throughout the Delsarte movement, appearing in many forms and extending well into the twentieth-century. As late as the 1920s Percy MacKaye eulogized his father as an artist who had been "perennially spider-webbed by the Liliputian ideas of commercialism" (Epoch I, xiii). For the Delsartians this power was necessary for the artist to carry out his or her purifying moral mission. Many of these Delsartians approached their art as though they were offering venerations at the sacred temple. As performers and messengers of sacred truths Delsartians articulated a performance style that was challenging to do properly and all encompassing. Stebbins claimed that artistic statue posing was "much more difficult" than traditional statue posing (DSOE 445). In her estimation, while it was easy to pose people as statues, it was difficult "to illustrate the modus operandi, according to strict rules of art, of how they arrived at the particular poise and expression in which we find them. To know this means a through knowledge of esthetics; and to do it implies an equal degree of physical culture" (DSOE 423).

The true artist had to be knowledgeable, committed, and physically adept: in command of all physical and mental faculties. In this framework, statue posing was both an end unto itself, i.e., the representation of beauty, Grace, and the sublime, and also a means to better comportment and command of self. Stebbins claimed that it "establishes the centre of gravity, lifts the vital organs to their proper places, and gives us control over our muscles" (DSOE 460). Control and proper use, as well as centering, concepts that have been vital to dance and movement training in the twentieth-century, ran counter to Victorian culture's socially prescribed habits and restrictions. Yet these terms serve as
watchwords in Stebbins' evaluation of her movement regimen. Ultimately teachers like Stebbins challenged their female students to become self-possessed in the name of art: “if we are to be real artists, we must understand the principles of our art, or we shall forever remain second-rate imitators” (DSOE 452). This admonition could easily extend beyond the artistic work of these pupils. It also argues for her high standards as an artist. She was not content to merely imitate, rather she sought autonomy and power in the artistic process. Also implicit in this statement is the prejudice held against statue posers in much of the larger culture. Stebbins and many of her colleagues desperately tried to overcome this prejudice, which they felt limited the horizons of these women as artists.

The level of artistry of the Delsartian posers is extremely difficult to assess. They were never part of the mainstream theatre establishment, so there are few reviews of their work. The scripts that remain are little more than scenarios, and their performance style relied on the ephemeral image of the woman’s body in motion. Nevertheless, the performance form represented an opportunity for women to subtly breach the containers of women’s images relied upon by a male Victorian establishment. The teachers who exalted this performance style promoted expanded concepts of “the lady” which still had to fit the confines of Victorian decorum. As Sara Delamont and Lorna Duffin have argued: “The feminists in education had to operate in a restricting and complex social environment in which the concept of “the lady” and the ideal of the saintly mother were enshrined and difficult to alter” (Introduction, Nineteenth-Century Woman 9-10). To break the molds while advancing within their society, women sought out the available
means to transform themselves and to “overflow their containers,” as Banta would say. If there were reform-minded posers - and the instructional texts of Stebbins, Bishop, and Georgen strongly suggest that there were - the progressive goals of self-control and self-possession advocated in many Delsartian exercises could not be boldly enacted upon a public stage without ostracizing these women and sinking their cause. According to Delamont and Duffin:

Any deviation from the male-dominated classification of behavior could lead to labels of witchcraft, prostitution, hermaphroditism and sub-humanity, and leave the woman polluted. The most successful feminist campaigners were those who managed to minimize hostile reactions by manipulating the classification system and not violating it (Introduction, *Nineteenth Century Woman*, 16)

In this restrictive context, statue posers vacillated between tangible conventionality in their daily lives and ephemeral liberation on the stage.

3.3 Performing the Ideal: The Impersonal Creation as Prison and Promise

The idealized form rooted in Delsarte’s philosophy cast the individual performer as a conduit for a universalized type. Performers were imprisoned in the ideal, yet the ideal representations often advocated expanded consciousness and liberation from a single identity. This impasse led to a number of contradictory statements, and ultimately the performance system and the training system could only be held together by the mind-body monism represented for Delsartians in psycho-physical culture. In keeping with the bureaucratic orientation, practical application and a fluid perception of truth-as-process tied together logical inconsistencies.
Typing and the belief in universal types and universal forms of expressions lay at the heart of Delsartian performance. The pose for “grief” or any other emotion relies on a universality of emotional expression no matter how much flexibility for the individual is encouraged within the form. In their eagerness to classify and to type Delsartians reflected a larger phenomenon in American culture. In Imaging American Women, Martha Banta concludes that by 1900 questions of identity had become a social obsession in America (7). At the heart of this obsession was the American eagerness to classify by type. Banta identifies several variations of the “American Girl” popular in the 1890s, including the “Beautiful Charmer,” the “New England Woman,” and the “Outdoors Girl” (46). She argues that numerous types came in and out of vogue as they served the changing purposes of advertisers, preachers, and other image makers (57). She also identifies a number of the factors that contributed to the eagerness to depict women as types, among them the widespread use of standardized elementary school art instruction manuals, which encouraged children and adults to see and to think in standardized ways (25). Ultimately viewing women as types was reductive and limiting, yet Banta makes a case for the Delsartians’ ability to use typing for counter-hegemonic purposes: “Through the Delsartean woman’s adherence to conventions of type, the unique sincerity of her privileged form counters the pull of conformity to social norms” (661). Her final analysis of the connection between Delsartism and type, however, is that it hindered rather than furthered the progress of women in the late nineteenth-century. She contends that through posing, these women were able to transform themselves into a Venus Naturalis which transcended the Victorian woman’s contradictions, her base reality, and
her inferiority, arriving at the fullest expression of the force of the female (661). While this suggests that the Delsartians' use of types was progressive, she contends that ultimately any gains were mitigated by the otherworldly qualities of the Delsartian mystique, so that these posers created an image of woman that was only open to two circumscribed possibilities: they were either ephemeral and therefore peripheral or they were "solidly the wife and mother" (678).

Banta has provided an excellent framework in which the historian of theatre may consider the images of women presented in Delsartian statue posing. The tension between the transcendent ephemeral image and confining domestic reality is especially compelling. However, the usefulness of Banta's model is limited by several shortcomings. First, the rigid binary Banta puts forth does not allow for the flexibility inherent in American Delsartism. In laying out her basic contrast between the decorpoorealizing, de-individualizing power of the Delsartian image of women and the circumscribed "earthly particularity of the body" (662), Banta does not accommodate the Delsartians' many practical efforts at education and health reform, nor does she explore their repeated calls for expanding the opportunities for women in society. Considering these calls and the many professional and social reformist aspects of their work, we can argue for a middle ground between ephemerality and disempowered domesticity that the most vocal Delsartians seem to have occupied. Furthermore, Banta's use of the Venus Naturalis model, while compelling, does not account for the initial American popularity of Delsartism, which can be attributed primarily to Steele MacKaye. MacKaye's ability to transform himself through the skillful, practiced exercise of Delsarte's system is one of
the reasons for his immediate success. MacKaye demonstrated this skill in Delsarte's studio and on his American lecture circuit. It would be quite a stretch to look to a Venus model to explain MacKaye's performances. It would also be impossible to argue that the Delsarte regimen was the sole domain of women, as Banta's analysis implies. In fact, the majority of Delsarte-based schools profiled by James McTeague in *Before Stanislavski* were run by men, and the popular Delsarte-based texts of Silas S. Curry and Edward Warman illustrate that this system provided a voice for men and women. In each of these areas the intersection between American society's eagerness to type and the practice of Delsartism practiced by American women seems to be more complex than Banta acknowledges.

Nevertheless, the reliance on types had deep roots in Delsartism. Many tenets of Delsarte's philosophy of art encouraged Delsartians to think in terms of type. This was demonstrated repeatedly in statements Stebbins attributed to Delsarte, including the claim that "Art is not, as is said, an imitation of nature. It elevates in idealizing her . . . . Art, finally, is the search for the eternal type" (378). But through their writings American Delsartians make clear that they believed type within Delsartism could both idealize and individualize. Ruyter has argued that Stebbins' goal in her statue posing was "the expression of universal truth ("Antique Longings," 77), and this view is supported by much of Stebbins' writing. She frequently argued for the value of the ideal type over individuality. She felt this belief system was demonstrated by the superiority of the Greek artistic model:

ancient sculptors . . . avoided individuality. They studied to keep their work free
from resemblance to any individual, giving no indication of the spirit, or of the
sentiments or affections, conceiving that all those movements destroy unity of
features and are foreign to beauty in the abstract. (451)

Furthermore, she attacked Silas S. Curry, author of *The Province of Expression* (1891)
and founder of The School of Expression in Boston for not seeing the value of a system
designed to arrive at an ideal and thus type-driven artistic rendering:

Curry goes on to say: "*Nature was never built in such a mechanical way." . . .

This is all pure assumption and it is not true. What is more purely mechanical
than *gravitation*? It can act in only one way. . . . The whole visible universe is
one superb piece of cosmic machinery. (441-42)

She also attacked Henry Irving, one of the most celebrated actors of the period, for
failing to depict the universal ideal in his acting:

Dramatic culture enables the actor to be original in his work and creative in his
impersonation. It enables him, above all things, to be typical instead of
individual, representative instead of personal. It is in this sense that Irving fails as
an great actor. He is always, in every part, personal, individual and unique. No
matter what the role, the character is distinctly Irving. (428)

Her praise for the ideal over the individual also influences the way she conceives of her
system and the way she teaches it. In her chapter entitled "Hints for Artistic Statue
Posing," she provides step-by-step descriptions for the types of movements needed for
artistic statue posing (459). A static ideal of expressions also shapes the teachings of
many of her fellow Delsartians, as can be seen in Bishop’s argument that complexity of
motion and emotion correspond: "hatred is expressed in simple, straight lines such as are used in fighting, while, to express love requires the double curve or spiral" (187-88).

Little room would seem to exist in this instruction for the individual to express his or her unique temperament or experience. For Stebbins the performer's individuality is subsumed into type, a point she articulates in her search for perfection in acting:

The perfect actor is he who becomes one with his part, and whose individuality is completely lost in the personality of the character he creates. . . . He must be typical, or he will fail. His expressions must be those which, while they belong to the recognized symbols of our common nature, have also the individuality of the character represented. People in real life don't show their emotions greatly, and this wouldn't work for the stage. The actor's art is to express in well-known symbols what in individual may be supposed to feel; and we, as spectators, recognizing these expressions, are drawn into sympathy. In other words we respond to the mental ideal of the actor, and so form a magnetic rapport with his artistic creation. . . . Strict fidelity to nature is nonsense (428-29). 18

The only individuality allowed to emerge during performance was that of the character, but the character is actually a creation from the playwright's imagination or a symbol for competing forces and ideas on stage. In Stebbins' approach to acting the actor would seem to have no individuality beyond the fictionalized character or the idealized emotion.

Yet elsewhere in Stebbins' writings the individual's contribution is key to successful Delsartian work; Stebbins advises her students that "To-day there is too much
imitation. . . . With proper training the twenty people [presenting a poem in pantomime] should show twenty divergences from the main type of action" (471). Her fellow Delsartians vigorously argued for a clear distinction between "idealized" and "conventionalized":

A conventionalized woman, compared with her emancipated, physically free sister, is as uninteresting and expressionless as is a conventionalized flower in a dado design, compared with the natural flower growing in graceful freedom (Bishop 114).

Conventionality was confining, but the ideal (although even more static than convention) was liberating. This distinction is especially apparent when the ideal is an overtly liberating concept like Bishop’s “graceful freedom,” but this liberation is present in all aspects of the ideal for the Delsartians. The reason is, quite simply, that the ideal comes from perfect Nature (reflected in the ancient Greek models for Stebbins) as opposed to fallible social convention.

Ultimately, the co-existence of the ideal and the individual appears as a sometimes uneasy compromise through which the Delsartian artist is encouraged to reproduce an ideal (and thus standardized) form through her individual will:

If, after studying the arrangement of an organic form whose inherent fitness I am supposed to know, I take possession of that arrangement under the title of methods, invariably to reproduce that form by substituting my individual will for its inherent cause, that is Art. (DSOE 136) 21

Stebbins takes this formulation of Delsartism, and through a transcendental union with
the object of the art, attempts to personalize it, allowing the individual will to emerge again:

Delsarte listed three types of humanity: intellectual, emotional, and vital. In actual practice, the working formula consists of principles which are in themselves impersonal. They are the powers which individualize the person and lie back of the personality. . . . in terms of easier comprehension, we may say that intellect, mental imagery and feeling are the real motor forces behind the personality or mask; the physical organism being nothing more than the external medium for their manifestation. . . . To place ourselves en rapport with the idea or thing, to create a living image of it in the mind and reproduce it with the vividness of its own natural life, is the quintessence of all that Delsarte or any other man can formulate in the art of expression" (388-89). (author's emphasis)

In the end we are left with a less-than-satisfying accommodation of these two forces within one system, an accommodation which encourages adherence to strictly uniform rules but purports to promote individuality. She argues that every artist since the Renaissance "worthy the name of genius, has instinctively followed Greek models. But they have . . . attributed their instinctive perception of form and poise, as taught by Greece, to some kind of spiritual inspiration. The fact is another proof, if any were needed, that the Greeks worked according to definitely formulated artistic laws" (376). By comparison, "modern artists . . . have, one and all, since antiquity, failed to express true art whenever they have attempted to be original" (376).^22

Stebbins encourages her students to subsume their identity in performance to that
of the group. Yet she implores her students and fellow women to assert their individuality in performance and in their willingness to question authority. This ambiguity is carried forward in her discussions of type. For Stebbins the faculties of expression: intellectual, emotional, and vital, were part of a formula which evokes "powers which individualize the person and lie back of the personality" (388). In assessing Stebbins' approach, therefore, we can conclude that identity starts in nature, as a type of behavior, action, or individual. From there, formulae she describes as "impersonal" served to "individualize" (388). In this context "lie back of" can be read as being closer to the truth of idealized nature in Stebbins' neo-Platonic system.

Stebbins seems to promote the individual, but one created from the universal and beholden to universal principles in expression and identity. As in so many other aspects of her thinking, Greek and Roman models serve as her inspiration. In her estimation the ancients worked in universal ideals that allowed for individual expression: "Every Ceres, every Cupid, every Mercury...is the same. They are all equally beautiful, but they cannot be mistaken one for the other, because each expresses his own idea" (374). How did this contradiction in Delsartian philosophy enter the social and political arena? Were Stebbins' pupils left to gather that each individual should express his or her own ideas within a closed system? If so, then this freedom was only freedom granted from one restrictive system in order to subscribe to another. But the writings of these Delsartian reformers suggest that there is more to this phenomenon than a new subordinate relationship for women.

The key here seems to be the same contrast between ideal of nature and
convention of society pointed out by Emily Bishop. Personal identity was subsumed to universal image, at least in part, as a means to grant power to the individual performer. 

Stebbins felt that the universal, the abstract, was the key to the Ancients' enlightened sense of the beautiful: "ancient sculptors . . . avoided individuality. They studied to keep their work free from resemblance to any individual, giving no indication of the spirit, or of the sentiments or affections, conceiving that all those movements destroy unity of features and are foreign to beauty in the abstract" (DSOE 451). She hoped to empower her students and free them from the worst restrictions of Victorian culture by imparting to them this sense of the beautiful and their own potential to achieve it.

In a similar manner, Eleanor Georgen in The Delsarte System of Physical Culture called upon the static ideal found in nature. Georgen's references to this ideal were usually not filtered through the Greek artistic model, although she did employ references to Greek statues and posed in Greekish costume. Georgen enjoined her students not to look to themselves as a model for sublime artistic work: "We must not take our own imperfect habits and mannerisms, which we misname Nature, as a model to express the perfection of a sentiment" (119). In this way, the self, the individual, was denied in the hopes that the individual performer - be she actor or statue poser - could achieve a universal power ultimately harnessed by and channeled through the individual.

The Delsartians' practical way out of theoretical morass that threatened to entangle idealized types and individualized contributions was "psycho-physical culture." As a monistic, symbiotic regimen of specific exercises in gestures and attitudes, psycho-physical culture was far more tangible than the multitude of Delsartian theories behind it.
The benefits of psycho-physical culture were argued repeatedly by Bishop and many of her fellow Delsartians:

Mind being the first cause of all outward expressions, it can readily be seen how healthful and helpful to all nervous and ailing persons is a training that leads to more reposeful states of mind. Psycho-physical culture does this. The physical and psychical natures act and react upon each other; mental states can be cast and recast by such physical exercises. (175)

Here lies the ultimate usefulness of intersecting individual and type. The individual can actually be re-made through understanding of, adherence to, and exercises in types of mental and emotional states with corresponding physical expressions. Bishop sees this as a liberation for the individual, especially given the potential within the individual to recast herself from a negative to a positive state. This could mean the innocuous change from a depressed to an elated state, but it could also mean the far more subversive recasting from an inhibited, conventionalized state to a state of liberated self-awareness.

3.4 Intangible Freedom: The Poser as Fluid and Unknowable

Within statue posing there was a constant tension between the power of the fixed ideal and the license of the fluid body. The flexibility to move between idealized images, and the attention called to the moments of transition by Stebbins point out the potential for Delsartian performance to subvert the fixedness on Victorian containers of women’s identities. Yet the same fluidity that seems to subvert domestic labels for women also denies a corporeality to these women. Instead, they are rendered unknowable through performance. While, as Nina Auerbach has illustrated in her studies of Victorian
narrative, an unknown identity can be a source of power for character, its usefulness for the performer’s liberation ends at the limits of the stage. Fluidity and “unknowability” shaped Delsartian performance, but any hope for liberation in the corporeal world would have to come from battles on different fronts.

3.4.1 Fluidity

Fluidity was a hallmark of the best Delsartian performance. Instructors repeatedly encouraged their students to avoid rigidity, inflexibility, or movements that lacked grace. Stebbins distinguished her teaching style by using statue posing with actors as a means to develop both control and fluidity in performance, and her performance style emphasized fluidity as well: “Stebbins presented statue poses not as separated scenes, but in a series of images in which the transitions figured at least as prominently as the poses themselves. Whether or not she invented this format, it was her hallmark.” (Ruyter, “Antique Longings” 78). A fluidity of identity may have been dangerous to those “reverent Victorians,” as Auerbach calls them, but it was essential to the best Delsartian posing and acting.

Eleanor Georgen also emphasized fluidity with her student actors at the American Academy of Dramatic Art. Georgen distinguishes between the fluid gestures of the actor in character and the fixed attitudes employed by the typical statue poser. In her description of gestures Georgen emphasizes fluidity both in terms of variety and the sense of motion of gestures. In regard to fluidity through variety, she argues that the student should not read her text as a rigid manual for effective gestures: “We must not lose sight of the fact that all the attitudes and gestures here given simply illustrate the
underlying principle of an infinite variety of expressions” (112). In regard to the fluidity through on-going motion, she argues that continuous motion and subtlety are required to achieve the effective gesture in the theatre: “A gesture, which is always transient in action, has an entirely different significance from the more permanent attitude” (116).

Transience was a key concept for both Georgen and Stebbins in performance. Regarding statue posing, Stebbins preferred the label “tableaux mouvants” rather than “tableau vivants.” Mouvants highlighted the visible transitions, which created a fluidity she often furthered by accompanying music (Ruyter, “Antique Longings” 73n8).

Auerbach has argued that the fluidity and transience in theatricality posed a threat to the stasis of Victorian culture: “Reverent Victorians shunned theatricality as the ultimate, deceitful mobility. It connotes not only lies, but a fluidity of character that decomposes the uniform integrity of the self” (Woman and the Demon 4). Indeed, she argues that even the most popular plays and novels of the period, works such as East Lynne and Sister Carrie that would seem to uphold the value of Victorian virtue and social order, are most memorable for their shifting images and transformations (“Revelations” 20). Fluidity and transience – in Georgen’s acting technique and Stebbins’ posing technique – decompose a static reality relied upon by the Victorian patriarchy. The same dynamism that enlivened performance for the Delsartian poser, teacher, and actor dissolved many of the Victorian limits on women’s identity.

Contrary to the stereotype of Delsartian gesture as mechanical, in their work with actors both Stebbins and Georgen stressed linked motivations for action, and fluidity was a key measure of the motivated gesture. Being lifelike meant being fluid in one’s actions
during performance. To make the case for the need for fluidity of gesture Stebbins quotes Delsarte's dictum that: "Nothing is more deplorable than a gesture without a motive" (DSOE 202). She went on to caution her acting students: "The action of head and arm in the above movements must be made simultaneously. *Each action flows into the subsequent one.* Always retain a gesture as long as the same thought or emotion is retained, or one remains in the same mood" (my emphasis) (202). In a monistic system that purports to improve life as much as performance, there is a small leap to make between Stebbins' instructions for better acting and instructions for better living. If gesture shapes mood and gestures should flow one into the next, then the individual is manipulating her mood through manipulating her gestures. She thus alters herself at will. Furthermore, the performer does so in a public forum, showing others that they, too, can do this. Compared to messages that women are a set of diseased organs, conflicting impulses, and hysterical drives put forth by patriarchal authority systems like the medical profession, this vision of woman is logically-ordered and self-empowering. Why else would motivations be so important in performance? The search for motivation relies on an ordered sense of the individual. The hysterical patient needs no logical motivation for her actions. In this sense Delsartian training and performance represent a great power held by women over their own state of being in Victorian culture. At its best the system acknowledged that ideal states of being were fixed, but that identities were life-like and fluid.

While the Delsartians sought expressions both life-like and ideally beautiful, they reinforced the fluidity of gesture and character in plays, and they highlighted the fluid
transitions between more permanent attitudes in statue posing. If indeed, women could shift so readily from Athena to Diana to Apollo, then fixed identities melted away and a certain license, an unknowability, grew up in its place. Stebbins and Georgen's emphasis on transitions signaled the moments between identities as the most telling moments for actors. Their protean powers were the key to any other powers of persuasion or empathy they might display.

3.4.2 Blankness: The Inability to Know the Subject

In her recent essay on Stebbins and the art of statue posing, Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter comments on the apparent contradiction between the implied freedom of Delsartians in performance and the seeming restriction of their costumes. Ruyter points out that while male and female warriors were a favorite subject of statue posers, their enactments of mythological deeds took place in feminine gowns which obscured their forms. This leads her to comment: "How ironic! The ladies are promoting bodily expression, but their bodies seem to be denied existence" ("Antique Longings" 85). Rather than simple irony, this costume, by keeping these women largely unknown, could be another instrument for a limited subversive power these women held.24

Indeed, the effort to hide the identity of the individual behind the pose took many forms for the Delsartian. Although Stebbins seldom wore makeup in her statue posings, many Delsartian statue posers did.25 For example, Eleanor Georgen used makeup as a depersonalizing element in her statue posings. Her plates at the end of The Delsarte System of Physical Culture show very thick, almost non-human, makeup (Georgen 122-27). These pictures of Eleanor Georgen in statue poses suggest makeup so heavy as to
obscure the features of her face, and mask her individuality altogether. (See Figures 3.3 and 3.4) Georgen also trains her actors to be unknown through a denial of self. These pictures and her advice in this regard suggest that, for her, the key to effective performance is to serve as the instrument - an empty vessel or tabula rasa - whereby the audience experiences emotion:

when the physical form is correct...the actor...is enabled to lend all his mental and emotional being to the artistic rendering of the lines and thought of the author.

...If the actor actually felt the true emotion, he would be so lost in himself that he would forget his audience, and so cease to be artistic. The study and aim of the artistic actor is to make the audience feel, not to be lost in his own emotions.

(120) (my emphasis)

Any feeling within the actor is self indulgence and not art. This self-denial finds it way into character acting as well as statue posing, as when Georgen makes clear to her student actor: “It is seldom a matter of what we would do ourselves, but of what the character we are impersonating would do” (Georgen 119)^. This advice leaves little doubt that the identity represented on stage is not the actor’s, but that of the character he plays.

If their costumes and makeup made Delsartian performers unknowable, then these women had access to a great disruptive power in Victorian culture. Indeed, in her examination of Esther Summerson in Dickens' *Bleak House* and Isabel Vane in Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne*, Auerbach argues that one of the key functions of transformation and perhaps its most empowering function, is to keep the women of the stories from being "knowable". The simultaneous license and modesty of the costume, the visibility of
REPOSE.

Figure 3.3. "Repose." From Eleanor Georgen's *The Delsarte System of Physical Culture* (1893).
Figure 3.4. "Apprehension." From Eleanor Georgen's *The Delsarte System of Physical Culture* (1893).
bare arms in motion and the loose, flowing quality of the drapery coupled with the
opacity of this form covering the torso and legs, as well as the depersonalizing makeup
covering the face, provided a blankness to the poser that offered a limited form of license
and power. The body veiled and mysterious, but freed from the constraints of the corset
and other restrictions of Victorian fashion, had a greater power than either the
constrained corseted form of domestic culture or the easily viewed (and thus easily
interpreted) fully exposed nude form. The blankness of these women, achieved through
costume, makeup, and the rules of statue posing, allowed them to inhabit the most
favorable middle ground between conventionalized repression and ostracized extremism.

Martha Banta also recognizes a frequent effort within statue posing to deny the
poser's individuality. She considers most of the women of her study as unknowns or
unknowable, but she tends to take the same approach to this blankness that Ruyter does,
limiting her examination to the ways it restricts and marginalizes women. The
assessment of this blankness by Auerbach, an assessment in which power is reserved for
the woman that is an object largely unknown by the subject, can allow the modern
historian to augment Ruyter's and Banta's observations with a more flexible
consideration of the power relationships in Victorian culture.

For her part, Stebbins' lack of makeup left open the possibility of making known
her own identity in her statue posing work. The work of her pupils, readers, and
colleagues often tended to be less self-revelatory. She recommended posing drills for
commencement exercises, but advised that they be done after training and in large groups
that could help to hide individual shortcomings ("Antique Longings" 82). Behind this advice is the expectation that the spectator would be looking not at individual women, but at a group of women prized for their uniformity and their ability to represent a type. Thus she made her pupils anonymous, even opaque by their sheer number, and commencement audiences across the country enjoyed a performance in which their young ladies-daughters, nieces, cousins, friends-had their knowable and controllable identities subsumed to blankness, Greekness, and unknowability. Commencement exercises all over the country offered nameless "Delsarte girls" performing drills and posing through a series of identities none of which were their own.

In Delsartian performance, whether presented by a solo artist on the stages of New York or by scores of young women in the local high school auditorium, once the individual was gone, all that was left was an image. This image - whether static or fluid, known or unknown, progressive or regressive, impersonal or individualized - was ultimately unreal. For advances to come through Delsartism, Second and Third Stage Delsartians would have to turn to more concrete avenues for progress. As we have seen in Chapter 2, one avenue for this progress was the issue of social reform which found its way into the teachings of many Delsartians. As we shall see in Chapter 4, another avenue for progress was the cause of professionalism in Delsartism, especially in the establishment of professional standards for teachers and artists.
ENDNOTES

1. Many other scholars have drawn attention to the subversive powers attributed to actors in Western culture throughout the centuries and the hatred and fear this power inspired among the ruling classes in successive generations. The most notable development of this line of argument can be found in Jonas Barish’s *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice*.

2. Diderot is present in every aspect of Roach’s text. In Roach’s estimation he exerted a profound influence on our century’s ways of viewing acting and he foresaw the greatest advances of nineteenth century science and psychology (157). Using Thomas Kuhn’s model of knowledge transmission, Roach argues that Diderot’s *Paradox of the Actor* is the paradigmatic text in acting theory for the last two centuries (116-17).


4. Two of Bishop’s most prominent examples include the opening instructions for exercises in Chapter X: “Walking.” All of these exercises begin with a suggested thought or image, including Exercise XXIII: “Hold some thought of dignity” (105), and Exercise XV: “Hold some thought of power through control” (111).

5. Stebbins chooses the term “mouvants” over the more common expression “tableau vivant” to highlight the activity and fluidity that different forms of statue posing shared as their emphasis.

6. Douglas argues that disestablishment resulted as much from economic progress as it did from restrictive attitudes toward women. Unlike their mothers, late nineteenth-century women in the middle and upper classes were no longer economically indispensable in the home as they increasingly became consumers rather than producers of goods:

   The system of household industry prevalent in the Northeast through the early decades of the nineteenth-century meant that the majority of women in the area during that time were actively engaged in the productive activities of feeding, clothing, and equipping the nation. . . . With the boom in inventions, the protection of the tariffs, and the opening of canals and railroads, the factories had within reach a low-priced . . . product and a market able and eager to buy it. By the time of the Civil War . . . middle class women . . . were far more interested in
the purchase of clothing than the making of cloth. (50-51)

Disestablishment included the loss of significant privileges for women, such as the right to vote in local elections or own property in some communities. It also removed women from a number of established professions or limited their access to emerging professions, such as a newly defined and restrictive medical profession (51).

7. This grander perspective on the universe and subsequent diminution of the human being provided a disturbing backdrop for the fluidity of identity enacted by Stebbins and other statue posers. This grander sense of time and the science of Darwin were both woven into the narratives of the Delsartians in complex and potentially contradictory ways. Stebbins, in particular, repeatedly emphasized the connections between the Delsartian’s art and the development of Western art from the time of the ancient Greeks. Yet in the midst of evoking the grandeur of centuries-old Grecian forms, she called upon Darwinian theory to advance her claims for Delsarte:

Delsarte’s definition of the Beautiful is: “Beauty at all times reveals perfection of function.” The researches of Darwin and later scientists have clearly demonstrated the truth of Delsarte’s definition. A thing is beautiful that attains the perfection of its function (449).

This follows immediately Stebbins claim that this “grand secret” is also found in the works of antiquity. The statue poser’s fluidity of movement in performance reflected a parallel fluidity of movement in thought which allowed Stebbins and others to shift between revering Greek art and employing theories of Darwinian evolution.

8. See Joseph Roach’s discussion of the ancient concept of pneuma. The Player’s Passion, Chapter 1.

9. William Archer, George H. Lewes, Steele MacKaye, D.W. Griffith and Constantine Stanislavski are just a few of the many individuals in the late nineteenth-century who struggled to understand the fluid dynamic between audience and actor, actor and character, and inspiration and technique. Archer, for example, devotes Chapter 5 of Masks or Faces? to the “mingling and kneading together” of personal and mimetic emotion (qtd. in Actors on Acting 367). According to Joseph Roach such inquiries can be traced to the ancients and work their way through Denis Diderot’s investigations. They project as far forward as the current decade, as illustrated by recent reexaminations of acting theory like Richard Hornby’s The End of Acting.

10. In her chapter “A Gamut of Expression in Pantomime” (DSOE 273-282), Stebbins offers a series of pantomimes in which she takes her students through the physicalizations for a series of emotions, including love, rejection, anger, fear, astonishment. She ends this exercise with the student fainting: “You faint, arms decomposing as you fall” (282). This image of the fainting woman seems to reinforce the powerless image of women. However, this image of fainting is intermingled with exercises in decomposing (relaxation). For Stebbins decomposing and recomposing are keys to the healthy use of the body as well as Delsartians performance. For a description
of the relationship between decomposing and relaxation, see *DSOE* 402-03. For a discussion of relaxation’s role in training the artist, see *Breathing* 76-80.

11. This image of the creation that breaks free from its creator, usually to the peril of society, runs throughout the nineteenth-century, as evidenced by the longstanding popularity of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1811). For a reading of Shelley’s text as a model of cultural fears and gender assumptions, see Deborah S. Wilson and Christine Moneera Laennec, eds., *Bodily Discusions: Genders, Representations, Technologies* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1997).

12. The comparison of the posers’ concern for the actor’s plasticity with Gordon Craig’s model of the actor as marionette reveals many similar concerns for the actor in performance. See “The Actor and the Ubermarionette” in *The Mask* 1(1908): 3-15 and *On the Art of the Theatre* (1911). Craig’s calls for the director’s power over the actors in a unified production also seem to be presaged in the application of posing’s principles to performance. For all of the encouragement Stebbins offers for her students’ self-exploration, reviews of her students’ statue posing activities and her repeated encouragements to find the ideal in art or expression emphasize the uniformity of their work. The force of Stebbins’ personality and the unchangeable ideal type both supported a singular vision in performance.

13. Her emphasis here on understanding how a subject arrives at a particular form of expression is one of many statements by Stebbins, Georgen, and other noted Delsartians that suggest an attention to process and motivation one would not expect from the typical account of pre-Stanislavski American acting. In *Before Stanislavski* James McTeague offers many examples of twentieth-century concepts of acting that are rooted in Delsarte-based schools of acting. In this instance it is important to realize that, while parallels can be drawn, Stebbins relies on a concept of motivation tied to what she views as universal aesthetic principles rather than a Freudian examination of a character’s individualized psychology. Several of Stebbins’ statements to this effect are explored in the next chapter.

14. The primary supplier of these manuals was the Prang Educational Company, which supplied educational materials to teachers throughout the country from the 1870s through the early years of the twentieth-century. See Banta’s discussion of the social significance of the Prang manuals (21-32).

15. Banta adopts the Venus Naturalis concept from Kenneth Clark’s work, particularly *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*. However, she only provides examples of women who pose for male artists - in this case relying upon the biography of Emma Hart, which she describes as “the story of a woman’s body passed around to a variety of male patrons” (661). Such examples do not account for the women like Stebbins, Clara Power Edgerly, or Eleanor Georgen who were artists able to use their own bodies as their means of artistic expression.
16. Banta's analysis does help us to find a place within American culture for the typing encouraged by Delsartism. This typing and the creation of the American Girl image which Delsartism abetted served the larger purpose of safeguarding the image of the American culture at a time of heightened immigration and xenophobia. As Banta argues, the American Girl had to be "visibly feminine" to win the war against the new immigrants in the slums (109). She had to counter popular images of immigrant women as creatures who reproduced rapidly and threatened to overwhelm American institutions and values. Banta's analysis of these images also requires us to confront one of the darker aspects of American Delsartism. For all of its progressive potential in promoting new images of women, the look or type of the Delsartian, with its frequent references to Greek and Roman antiquity and encouragement of the ideal type, reveals an inherent racism and bigotry among many Delsartians, and suggest that American Delsartism was seen by at least some of its adherents as one way to maintain the racial and cultural purity of American homogeneity. The inherent contradictions within this phenomenon are numerous. These include the use of the culture of ancient Mediterranean peoples as a means to exclude a population largely comprised of current Mediterranean peoples, as well as the adoption of a doctrine deeply rooted in Roman Catholic teachings to buttress an American image that is largely Northern European and Protestant. Nevertheless, when the researcher comes across references to phrenology, especially when it is presented by the most sophisticated of the Delsartians, as in Stebbins' claim that a skilled phrenologist could assist her readers (Breathing 16), he or she is reminded of the limits of progressive thought in this movement and in American culture in the late nineteenth-century. However, through these contradictions and similar statements steeped in the prejudices of the era, we can begin to appreciate the role of typing in Delsarte Culture and its contribution to women's identity and image-making.

17. For a firsthand account of MacKaye's studio work in Paris, see Francis Durivage "Delsarte," The Atlantic Monthly May 1871: 613-20. For a discussion of MacKaye's lecture circuit, see Epoch I, Chapter 8, 228-35.

18. There is strong evidence to suggest that elements of American Delsartism did encourage a style of acting closer to Realism than the style that dominated the American stage in the late nineteenth-century. For numerous illustrations of this claim see Edward Warman's 1892 Delsarte-based text Gestures and Attitudes for examples of the illusion of the first time (366) and a very modern-sounding attack on rigid rules of acting (374). Even so, statements such as Stebbins' serve as powerful reminders that when historians criticize Delsartians for being so far removed from a "realistic" acting style, they may not be considering that realism in acting was not the intent of these artists. Stebbins firmly believed that the naturalism that was emerging in the theatre was a detriment to its ability to portray truth and beauty. To judge her work and that of many Delsartians as stiff and unnatural (a term far too often simplified to mean "unrealistic"), opposing the values of realism, is to miss the point.
19. Divergence within type may sound like a contradiction until we relate such teachings to similar examples in other currently popular training forms such as Suzuki.

20. Bishop’s search for “graceful freedom” presents a co-mingling of the concepts grace and freedom which Banta’s arguments for the disempowering aspects of grace does not accommodate. See Banta Chapter 15, “The Purchase of Grace.”

21. What is presented here is Delsarte’s definition of art, as offered by Stebbins, included in a section also offering Delsarte’s definitions of semiotics, aesthetics, ontology, physiology, and anatomy, although, except for a passing reference to Arnaud’s work on Delsarte, she does not present her source for these definitions (136-37).

22. Stebbins’ statements present several dilemmas. First, if the Greek model is paramount and all art that does not owe its inspiration to the truths discovered by the Greeks, then how can a form foster self expression (a benefit she, Georgen, and other Delsartians attribute to statue posing) when all originality is deemed false by the form’s propagators. These statements also make clear that Greekness was not merely a “fashion” for Stebbins, but a deeply held conviction, almost a religion. While this complicates the image many historians put forth of Delsartians as merely middle class antiquarians, it raises yet another perplexing dilemma: How does Stebbins, whose writings display a Christian orientation, reconcile the Greek superiority of thought with her non-Greek, Christian orientation?

23. Indeed the uniformity of self seems to be a source of constant debate in Victorian acting. Archer’s Masks or Faces? is but one of many inquiries into the division of self for the actor.

24. Ruyter admits that the inability to see women’s bodies clearly in the poses from surviving photographs could be due to the camera technology of the time and the need to hold one position for an extended period. However, the repeated encouragement to subsume the individual to the universal in posing supports the argument for individual bodies denied existence. The nature of Delsarte drills, in which hundreds of similarly dressed women would be choreographed to simultaneously proceed through the same series of movements, would also seem to support this denial of the individual’s body in favor of the mass-produced idealized image.

25. Stebbins’ lack of makeup is attested to by reviewers such as the reviewer for the New York Sun, who wrote that he observed “no signs of white powder or other makeup” in her performances. See Ruyter, “Antique Longings,” 83.

26. This advice appears more than thirty years before Stanislavski’s “magic if” is articulated in American acting circles. See Stephen Lawrence Floyd’s 1993 study on the development of a technical vocabulary in the acting textbooks of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century. Floyd effectively demonstrates that Delsartian texts and like-
minded American acting texts from the same period laid the foundation for Stanislavski's acceptance in America.

27. This begs the question: what happens to the identity of the performer during the performance? Is its subsumed by the character and obliterated, only to be reborn after the performance? Or does it exist in some half-real, simultaneous state, inhabiting a world not fully understood, much like the identity of the mesmerized subject that haunts and captivates Victorian culture? Either possibility opens the door to a power of identity - fluidity or blankness - not available to most Victorian women.

28. Auerbach puts forth her arguments for the power of the unknowable on pages 25-28 of Narrative. One of the key dramatic characters in this discussion is Hamlet's Ophelia. Ophelia is an amazingly popular character with Victorian audiences, and she is the subject of many interpretations and adaptations in short stories, dramas, burlesques, and the visual arts. Auerbach contends that the Victorian fascination with Ophelia comes, in large part, from the fact that she is largely unknown and unknowable.
CHAPTER 4

DELSARTIANS AS PROFESSIONALS

Theatre served as an unusually receptive forum for professional woman in the nineteenth-century, as evidenced by the successful careers of Anna Cora Mowatt, Olive Logan, Charlotte Cushman, Elizabeth Robbins and many other actresses. For the most part, however, the women of Second and Third Stage Delsartism have not been written into the history of the professionalization of American theatre. In spite of that omission, their texts and careers illustrate that the best of these teachers were teaching in the leading theatre schools of the late nineteenth-century, they were constantly seeking higher professional standards for their fellow teachers and artists, and they were engaged in competitive entrepreneurial activities as heads of private studios and conservatories. The school-based model of actor training benefitted women enormously, and the belittling of their efforts by male theatre practitioners and educators emboldened many of these Delsartians to speak with an assertiveness foreign to the domestic ideal for Victorian women. A careful consideration of their work reveals many contributions of the Delsartian authors to the professionalization of the American actor training and offers insights into the struggle for greater opportunities for Victorian women in the
professional world. As we consider the professionalization of these Delsartians, five areas of investigation emerge: 1) the ways in which a professional orientation was veiled by sentimental language, 2) the role of school-based actor training in supporting greater professional opportunities for women, 3) the nature of Delsartian professionalism as a defense against attacks on the system and the women promoting it, 4) a hybrid form of status-seeking that is both professional and self-promotional, and 5) the professional assertiveness of Delsartian women.¹

4.1 The Veiled Professional Orientation

A professional earnestness is present in the writings and teachings of many Delsartians, although it is at times coded or veiled in ways that do not emerge from an initial reading of their instructional materials.² Historians may be misled by the tone of their instructional texts and the articles found in Werner's. Even the most progressive Delsartians wrote in the idiom of sentimentalism or they could be swept up in the religious fervor that fueled their convictions about this system. However, their seemingly unprofessional statements often have a very pragmatic purpose, and are intermixed with practical instructions, exercises, or advice to the reader. For example, Genevieve Stebbins begins Lesson IV in the Delsarte System of Expression in the following informal, sentimental manner:

Good day. Will you have this bunch of goldenrod? Let me fasten it in your dress, an autumn greeting. I have come from a walk through the fields, and purple aster, and red sumach, and goldenrod look up to the grey-tinted sky. Have you made as much progress in your work as nature has in hers? (135)
Though it reads as sentiment, and at first seems unworthy of the attention of practical-minded historians of theatre training, it also invites from the reader a progress report. This greeting is immediately followed by one of the most pragmatic sections of the book, a section in which Stebbins deals at length with issues of efficiency in posture and walking. If the historian can look past his initial impressions of this passage, he will find that Stebbins’ words offer several valuable insights regarding the professional efforts of these women. First, the passage clearly indicates a woman addressing another woman. Very few instructional, professional texts from this same period present this same author-reader dynamic. Second, the informal tone of the passage invites, and perhaps anticipates, the participation of a wide readership, and thus promotes a more egalitarian vocational call to women to take up this work. A similar intention can be found in the preface to Emily Bishop’s *Americanized Delsarte Culture*. Bishop points out to her readers that the Lesson Talks scattered throughout the text are “reports of informal class lectures” (x). She also identifies her audience and makes clear her informal writing style has been fashioned to serve that audience:

> The exercises herein are intended to meet the varied needs of . . . classes being usually composed of grandmothers, mothers, and daughters - with an occasional gentleman. In order to make the teaching simple and direct, all technical terminology has been avoided, and a colloquial style preferred. (x)

The same techniques employed by Stebbins and Bishop can be found in serious acting texts throughout the twentieth-century. Every serious student of Stanislavski is familiar with his fictional student in *An Actor Prepares* and the other seminal texts that

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introduced his methods to English-speaking actors. Similar rhetorical techniques can still be found in acting texts today. Richard Brestoff, in his 1995 text *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods*, employs a casual tone in an attempt to connect with a large population of advanced and novice actors. His techniques in this regard include an imaginary conversation between the reader and Thespis woven into the first two chapters of the text. In this modern, professional, trade-oriented text Brestoff deliberately employs a strategy intended to capture and hold the widest possible readership among those considering a career in the theatre. Brestoff's apparent strategy is to appeal to potential readers, mostly young actors, who would find an informal language more appealing than a dry dissection of various acting methods. In a similar manner, many of Stebbins' and Bishop's students would have been attuned to the language of sentimentalism. It would be presumptuous and narrowminded for modern scholars to conclude that Stebbins' use of a similar type of informality is any less calculated, shrewd, or professional.

4.2 **Opportunities in the Professional Theatre Schools**

The emergence of acting schools contributed greatly to the professionalization of American theatre in the late nineteenth-century. This phenomenon has been charted by James McTeague, Benjamin MacArthur, and Fred C. Blanchard. All three scholars have argued that the most important contribution of these schools was their success in promoting a shift away from mere imitation under the apprenticeship system and toward the establishment of standardized, scientific principles in actor training. Professional theatre schools, located in Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, Pittsburgh,
and in many other cities throughout the United States also contributed greatly to the
decentralization of American theatre training in the same years that saw the emergence of
the combination company and the monopolistic practices of the Theatrical Syndicate
(Blanchard 619). This decentralizing force came decades before the height of the Little
Theatre Movement and the Community Theatre Movement, and its impact was felt more
than half a century before the development of the current network of professional
regional theatres in the United States. By replacing the apprentice system and
decentralizing instruction, theatre schools offered unprecedented opportunities for
women.

Both the structure of the early acting schools and the American training systems
based on Delsarte's teachings provided women in American theatre a more equitable
relationship to men than was possible under the apprenticeship system that ruled the
theatre in the stock company era. The old apprenticeship system was based on imitation
and therefore inherently conservative. As an imitative system, it was also more prone to
be gender-segregated and male-centered.\footnote{By contrast, the new professional approach
claimed to promote scientific principles of expression in a more gender-neutral and
integrated environment. It provided a means to enhance exploration of the actor's body
and to develop physical exercises for acting instruction. If acting knowledge could be
transmitted through study and application of standardized, "scientific" principles
promoted by acting schools, then almost anyone would be capable of achieving theatrical
success. Not surprisingly, this new approach attracted women to the theatre schools in
disproportionate numbers. For example, from 1884 to 1903 the American Academy of}
Dramatic Art counted 161 women among its 278 graduates, or 58% of its enrollment (MacArthur 102). In a profession dominated by men, these schools represented unparalleled opportunities for women. Not only were prominent women on the faculty of these schools, including Eleanor Georgen at the American Academy of Dramatic Art, but women also founded a number of prominent schools of acting and elocution. These women included Anna Baright, who founded the School of Elocution and Expression in Boston (1879), and Mary Blood and Ida Riley, who founded the Columbia School of Oratory, Physical Culture, and Dramatic Art in Chicago (1890). Furthermore, the enrollment figures from most of these schools, including the American Academy of Dramatic Art, indicate that students were more likely to see women than men as their classmates.

These changes represented a profound shift in American theatre and the role of women as professionals within that theatre. Perhaps no more tangible illustration of these opportunities can be offered than the school-centered career of one of the most prominent Delsartian women of the era, Eleanor Georgen. Georgen taught at the American Academy of Dramatic Art under Franklin Sargent for ten years, offering Delsarte-based courses in pantomime and recitation (McTeague 80). She achieved a national prominence in the theatre school community and the Delsartian community with her text *Delsarte System of Physical Culture*, published in 1893, and performed as a statue poser throughout the 1890s. She also taught at the National Dramatic Conservatory in New York City, founded by F.F. Mackay in 1898 (McTeague 218). Her service in both of these institutions supported curricula described by McTeague as "anti-
emotionalist" (225). Although a reductive term, it emphasizes a potentially liberating scientific approach based upon “logical deduction” rather than imitation or sentimentalized ideals. Mackay argued for this approach in his text *The Art of Acting*:

The emotional nature of the dramatic character cannot be fully known until the artist has a clear conception of the psychology or mentality of the character, which conception can only be received by the artist through logical deduction made by an analytical study of the grammatical construction of the author’s sentence. (291)

By the start of the twentieth-century, Georgen taught in a technique-based school with the modern mission of analyzing scripts down to “the grammatical construction of the author’s sentence” for evidence of acting choices. Her Delsartian instructional text and her service to Mackay’s and Sargent’s technique based schools demonstrate that, rather than teaching an idiosyncratic and purely imitative model of acting conventions, she supported a new model of acting and actor training that encouraged the progressive values of a standardized profession. This approach, while given to inconsistencies in logic and assumed connections between art, science, and religion, offered a significant advancement beyond the imitative model and conservative values of the old apprentice system.

4.3 The Defensive Nature of Delsartian Professionalism

In large part, the attention to professionalism among the leading Delsartians arose out the defensive position they found themselves in at the end of the nineteenth-century. Many established men of the theatre found the Delsartian phenomenon difficult to
understand, and unworthy of serious consideration. The inability to find a place for these women wove its way into criticisms of the system as a whole, so that both the system and the women who advocated it were seen as perversions or absurdities. In response, Delsartian leaders called for higher standards of professionalism for their fellow teachers. Even in their discussions of motherhood, etiquette, and appearance these women seem obsessed with the standards of teachers in this movement, likely because in these early years of what was envisioned as a new era of movement culture, one teacher could have a far reaching and profound influence on an entire profession. The challenge for these women was defining universal standards of quality in a system given to endless variations and without a central body of writings to guide its adherents. Paradoxically, then, the system came to be defined by the need for standards and an inability to define clear standards. This search for standards led the Delsartians on a tortuous professional path which included 1) substituting vague claims that Delsarte work is “difficult” for a clear measure of skill in Delsarte work, 2) uniting artistic heritage and modern science, and 3) hybridizing practicality and religion. All of these efforts can be seen as attempts to demonstrate the professional earnestness of their efforts.

The interweaving of anti-Delsartism and misogynist sentiments can be illustrated by considering the anti-Delsartian view of Silas S. Curry, founder of the Boston School of Expression, as articulated in *The Province of Expression* (1891). It can also be seen in a series of lampoons published by George M. Baker, the period’s most successful writer of amateur theatricals, in the 1880 and 1890s. The unusual nature of women functioning
as independent professionals, and often as entrepreneurs, colors the perception of these women among teachers of acting and elocution and in the general theatre community.

Curry is generally sympathetic to the efforts of the original Delsartians in America, crediting Delsarte and MacKaye with offering a system that expanded artists understanding of the body. But while MacKaye deserves some credit for this new understanding, Curry quickly distinguishes between his serious work and the work of his followers. These followers offered “exaggerated claims that the system contained a key, not only to all difficulties of delivery, but to all art and to the whole universe. . . . All this encouraged the wildest pretension” (336). MacKaye spoke of these universal applications at great length, but Curry always distinguishes between MacKaye and the “so-called Delsartians” who now corrupt the system. Curry’s critique of the current state of the system has become so intertwined with an attack on the women that pollute it, that the system and the women are indistinguishable. Of this disreputable system Curry claims:

The so-called Delsarte system of training which is everywhere spoken of, . . .
does not come from Delsarte or from MacKaye. It is a perversion of some of the exercises mixed with the common calisthenic movements; in some cases even musical accompaniment to the exercises has been added which was entirely foreign to Delsarte. It is more frequently governed by sentimental considerations than by any principle ever obtained from Delsarte. (355-56)

Tellingly, Curry presents only one example of the supposed perversion
To show how Delsarte’s trainings have been perverted, a lady has arranged an exercise which she calls “get up drunk.” Her young lady pupils with dreamy eyes fall upon the floor and stagger up in the most irregular way possible, the torso and the upper body completely abandoned. She says in explanation that this exercise is to enable students to stand with the least possible expenditure of energy. (356)

What probably unnerves Curry is a room full of seemingly drunk women. But even if we grant that the exercise is silly, it hardly illustrates that the Delsartian women and their students were perverse in their training. Curry’s statement is a gross mischaracterization of the efforts of the best Delsartian teachers.

George M. Baker’s critiques of women Delsartians took the form of popular burlesques of the system. Because Baker was such a successful lampooner, and he would likely only target subjects familiar to his audiences, these burlesques afford an unusual opportunity to gain some sense of the visibility of Delsartism and the general impression of Delsartism among the general population. Throughout Baker’s plays, rather than specific criticisms against Delsartism, his primary concern seems to be that the systems lead young women astray. This is the central issue in The Grecian Bend, and it is repeatedly emphasized in Baker’s most popular lampooning of Delsartism: The Seldarte Craze (1887, reprinted 1889).⁶

Baker’s primary target in The Seldarte Craze is Steele MacKaye, caricatured in the form of “Professor Archimedes Abbott, Principal of the Realistic School of Expression.” However, Baker continually demonstrates an inability to see the women engaged in Delsartism as legitimate artists or professionals. At best they are former
students who have been made wise to the absurdity of the system or they are naive
students who serve as easy income for their duplicitous male teachers. In this regard the
characterization of "Minnie Moneybags," a pupil of the "Seldarte" system, is telling.

Baker describes Minnie's appearance as "about thirty-five; costume to be very
'young,' face old. . . . Gray hair, eye-glasses" (4). Her lines are repeatedly punctuated
with a "Te, he" which Baker claims is meant for a giggling laugh (4). Throughout the
play Minnie is put through excruciating drills and absurd exercises, such as swinging
from a rope until she complains of dislocated shoulder-blades and wrists. Her
counterpart, "Mary, the Maid of the 'In and Out' Department," describes the conditions
that brought her and her companion to misery in the school:

because we succeeded in pleasing a few people in our native town with our
amateur acting, we thought we were capable of astonishing the world, so came to
this realistic school for the finishing touches, spent all our money for lessons, and
were glad enough to accept situations until we could get enough to return home
sadder and wiser. (7)

Through this defeated and reformed women, Baker suggests that the women who took up
Delsartism did so because of false ambitions, and a naivete about real acting and real
professionalism. They can only become happy again once they have rejected the false
promise of the system and recognize their limited potential as moderately pleasant
amateur actors not fit for the "professional" stage. In Baker's story the treatise for the
Seldarte system is ultimately found out to be a practical joke penned by an acquaintance
of Professor Abbott. As a result the school closes, and presumably the virtue and finances of the women under its spell are saved.

As a response to these image of women Delsartians, Stebbins and her colleagues refute specific charges and attempt improve the overall image of the movement and these women. The most frequent charge leveled against the Delsartians, then and in years to come, was that the system, because of its mechanistic divisions, promoted mechanical movements in its adherents and practitioners. To answer this charge Stebbins calls on Delsarte's own words:

Delsarte says: "External gesture, being only the reverberation of interior gesture, which gives it birth and rules it, should be its inferior in development." . . . After reflecting seriously on the foregoing, how can one call the system of Delsarte mechanical? Do we consider the blossoming into beauty of a rose mechanical because we soften the sod and hard soil through which it must force itself into being? We make the ground flexible for the tender rootlets, as we aim to make the clay of which we are made plastic to the inner emotion. (DSOE 138)

In her choice of an excerpt from Delsarte's writings as well as the analogy she presents her reader, she articulates her allegiance to the basic tenets of Delsartism, and she also confirms her strong belief in the benefits of practice and drill in the American exercises. Revelation of inner state and inner potential remains her primary purpose, and an empowering basis for the Delsarte training she employs. However, she clearly did not follow Delsarte's philosophy in blind obedience.

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Attacks from established male educators and artists, including some of the most visible advocates of Delsarte's work in America, often strengthened women Delsartians' calls for higher standards for their profession. As part of a long-standing feud between Stebbins and Reverend Alger, one of the first and most vocal supporters of MacKaye's in the United States, some of her writings reveal a defensiveness and a need to clarify the extent of her own knowledge. For example, regarding the religious basis of Delsarte's teachings, she contends:

Lest Mr. Alger and others should think that I undervalue this scholastic philosophy because of my ignorance of it, I would say that the writings of Origen, Tertullian, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, St. Basil, and St. Thomas of Aquinas are quite familiar to me. Unfortunately, very few Delsartians are acquainted with the scholastic wisdom of the Church. (392fn)7

Her lament for the lack of appreciation among Delsartians for church teaching is only one of many such calls Stebbins and the other leading Delsartians issued for the highest standards for their profession.8 Stebbins traced many of the misconceptions the general public held regarding Delsartism to these substandard teachers: "Incompetent teachers of the art, ignorant of physiology, have caused the Delsarte system to be stigmatized in the public mind as "the doctrine of limpness" (401).9

Stebbins and others argued for professional standards in every aspect of Delsartian education. She warned that a teacher of Delsarte, just as any professional, should have a thorough knowledge of her trade:
a promiscuous, haphazard, and ignorant indulgence in gymnastics may be productive of serious injury. . . . a duly-qualified and thoroughly practical teacher is indispensable to obtain permanent beneficial results. Every Delsartean should possess knowledge of physiology, and of physiological effects of different forms of motion (405).

She also lamented teachers whose approaches to teaching revealed a lack of comprehension of Delsarte’s (and her own) grand principles. She advised these teachers that Delsarte emphasized “perfect coordination of predetermined action with natural spontaneity . . . and it is almost amazing in this one important respect to find how completely he is misrepresented and misunderstood by teachers who ought to know better” (440). She promoted dialogue among teachers and performers of Delsarte, and frequently weighed in on the value of specific approaches to teaching the system. In one instance she questions a teacher who uses statue posing for teaching expression. In contrast to the teacher’s methods, Stebbins claimed statue posing could train the body in grace, deportment, and gesture, but argued that it was a “roundabout” way to teach expression, countering: “who ever saw any distinct expression in a Greek statue?” (447) Most often, however, she is arguing not so much for subtle positions on particular exercises, but for heightened standards across the profession. With this goal in mind, she frequently questions the way teachers of Delsarte’s ideas present themselves as examples of Delsartism: “Why are so many teachers of Delsarte ungraceful? And why are so many teachers of physical culture themselves sorry specimens of physical beauty and development?” (415). She expects good teachers to be a “living demonstration” of
their principles and, to this end, quotes the scripture passage “By their fruits ye shall know them” (415).

In the end, her harshest criticisms are designed not so much to attack individuals as to raise the standards of the profession. To determine why so many Delsartians are physically awkward, she looks to a trade-oriented population of teachers within Delsartism that may have embraced these teachings too exclusively as a means to professional development rather than as a means to develop the whole person:

It is not because of a lack of knowledge, or a lack of ability in their special line.

It is because they know so very little of anything else. The average Delsartian has been a bread-and-butter one, who has not studied the deeper and vital principles of her art. She has been wholly esthetic [and] has had no physical foundation on which to build her art. (415-16)\textsuperscript{11}

From her lament it would appear Stebbins felt that women latched onto Delsartism as a profession and a source of identity for lack of any other meaningful measure of their merits. Her solution to this dilemma, comprehensive physical conditioning for the artist, is a surprisingly modern concept which did not take hold in American training programs until after the influence of Stanislavski was felt in this country.

In contrast to Stebbins, Georgen’s approach reveals that “difficulty” became an ill-defined but nevertheless powerful measure of professionalism as well. Rather than admonish her students, she tries to impress upon them the gravity and the complexity of this study. She frequently reminds her reader that only careful study allows one to master the secret of the “refined actor,” Georgen’s ideal of the professional artist: “The
refined actor, of either sex, possesses for us an infinite charm and fascination . . . because of the individual’s easy, unaffected, expressive manner, free from all conventional restraint” (Georgen 118). In a system so stigmatized for its artifice and rigidify, it is telling that Georgen identifies the highest achievement of her profession primarily in terms of freedom. This freedom of which Georgen and her colleagues speak comes not from a romanticized, sentimentalized image of the artist who waits for inspiration to possess her. Instead, it comes as the result of the hard work of the professional teacher and artist. Indeed, Georgen makes a great effort to distinguish the study of the dilettante from the sustained, lifelong work of the professional artist:

If the student leads a quiet private life and has taken up this training simply as an accomplishment, as a form of physical culture or cultivation of grace, her work was finished before we began the study of attitudes. But if, on the other hand, she intends entering upon a public life where any form of expression is required, or if she enjoys the study of psychological facts, she has only begun, has simply laid the foundation of her work, by learning the principles which must be applied to artistic expression. (118)

Georgen’s statement leaves little doubt that the most advanced portions of her text are intended for those women who enter “public life.” She was concerned not just for the professional Delsartian, but for the emerging population of professional women in all areas of public life.
Interwoven with this advice to professionals, and paramount to it, is the primary duty of women in society: raising healthy, expressive children. As part of her professional text, Georgen discusses child rearing and the role of mothers in raising graceful, naturally moving children. In her estimation, bad habits can be avoided by "[a] little watchfulness on the part of the mother, a few timely words from day to day" (73). Georgen offers additional advice to mothers, and in doing so, struggles to link the newly fashioned identity of Delsartian to the traditional Victorian role of mother:

Teach a young child to wait upon itself and its parents. These remarks may appear to the reader as a digression . . . but we cannot consider them quite in this light, since Delsarte in his work strove to teach ideal naturalness . . . if the body is allowed to grow misshapen, it is apt to deform the mind . . . As we take up the subject of general deportment, we would impress upon the young mother, whose interest in this topic is most keen, that while trying to improve herself by the study of physical culture and deportment, she has no right to forget her children, but must study their movements and tendencies even more closely than her own. (author's emphasis) (73-4)¹²

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of this statement is that this call to the primacy of motherhood does not conform to the disempowering, sentimentalizing image fostered by Douglas' and Banta's treatment of Victorian motherhood. Rather, coupled as it is with advice to the professional artist and situated within a text for professional actors in training, it has the potential to empower women and encourages them to identify their ambitions with the greatest means of power for women in nineteenth-century society.
The better professional can also be the better mother; her new ambitions enhance her abilities to perform her traditional duties. Their search for high standards in a new profession void of sympathetic authorities led even the most professional-minded Delsartians to turn to traditional areas of influence for women as a means to establish their own authority. Georgen's advice to mothers exemplifies this reliance on the traditional spheres of influence for women.

4.4 The Professional and The Self Promotional

The lack of clear standards for professionalism in this field and the competitive nature of the schools and private studios where Delsarte instruction was offered led teachers to intermingle professional status and self-promotional proclamations of their own "fashionable" status. This intermingling relied on the traditional realm of influence for Victorian women, and it took two basic forms: fashionable status that promoted an individual's teaching in competition with her fellow Delsartians and fashionable statue that promoted the system as a whole. Both indicate that, despite the lack of clear criteria for standards, a professional identity served Delsartians as a group and as individuals, and that this professional identity was firmly in place throughout the 1890s.

The competitive, entrepreneurial model of status-seeking can be seen in various Delsartians' efforts to promote their own "fashionable" studio, instructional method, or school. Lacking a concise, logically-consistent vocabulary, and subjected to an increasingly hostile and competitive environment, the leaders of the Delsartian community of women found themselves caught between the desire to promote practical, beneficial training, and the need to promote their own reputations among prospective
students and colleagues. In this environment status-seeking became a substitute for clear, universal measures of professionalism. Many of the instructional texts and the pages of Werner's Voice Magazine are filled with testimonials which identify the "fashionable" or well-known schools and individuals instructors have been associated with. Even Stebbins, arguably the most self-assured and comprehensively educated Delsartian, partakes of this status seeking and self-promotion. Her recognition of her own discoveries and her contributions to Delsartism border on self-aggrandizement. This posturing ranges from testimonials by fellow Delsartians within The Delsarte System of Expression that Stebbins gives an annual Delsarte Matinee at a "leading theatre" (Wilbor essay in DSOE 485) to her concerted effort to lay claim to the development of "artistic" statue posing:

Some years ago, when a species of statue-posing departing widely from classic art began to be taught in various parts of the country, I prefixed the word "artistic" to the words "statue-posing," to distinguish classic ideals from ordinary statue-impersonation and tableaux mouvants. Artistic statue-posing, in the sense I use the words, means embodiment and careful following out, as far as human things can, of the divine ideal in high art. (DSOE 445) (my emphasis)

She repeatedly calls the reader's attention to her own novelty, authority, and innovation within the Delsarte system she espouses, as in her claim, regarding the study of statues, that she was "the first Delsartian to do this on the line or artistic investigation" (446). Her deliberate attempt to identify herself as a "Delsartian" here and elsewhere is also noteworthy as part of a larger project to build an common identity between the women
who worked in this field. She also uses the term to identify herself as a highly specialized professional in the modern sense rather than simply an artist or a teacher. The effort to call attention to one's own contributions to a field and thus validate one's work and one's text is not surprising if we see these women as professionals who are trying to establish reputations and standards within an emerging, highly competitive field.

It is also not surprising to see these efforts in other texts besides Stebbins. For example, Eleanor Georgen begins the first edition of *The Delsarte System of Physical Culture* in 1893 with a reproduction of a handwritten endorsement by Franklin Sargent, the head of the American Academy of Dramatic Art, for which Georgen taught Delsarte-style courses in acting and stage movement. In this endorsement, Sargent boasted that the material Georgen offered her readers:

> seems to me to be of decided utility. This printed work will give permanent life to the sincere, sensitive and sensible spirit of your teaching. This result of your scholarly investigations in the art of expression and of your extensive experiences in the science of teaching - this work which you present to your profession and to the public cannot prove otherwise than most valuable. It is plain, practical and picturesque. (Letter from Franklin Sargent to Eleanor Georgen, Reprinted in *Delsarte System of Physical Culture* 8)

Georgen's effort to secure the endorsement of perhaps the most respected individual in the emerging profession of actor training is significant not only for the prominence of its location at the beginning of her text, but also because it signals a fundamental shift away
from the individualized, idiosyncratic training of the apprentice system and toward a visibly scientific, quantifiable, and objective approach to actor training. Most of the terms Sargent employs to praise Georgen's work: "of decided utility," "scholarly investigations," "science of teaching," and "practical" are targeted for professionals and call attention to the professionalism of the instructor's work. He even goes as far as to identify Georgen's primary readership as "your profession," notable both for the professional label and the sense of ownership which he imparts to this Victorian woman.

Julia and Annie Thomas' *Thomas Psycho-Physical Culture* (1892) offers one of the clearest examples of the private commercial studio entrepreneur developing a text, an instructional system, and a professional association to advance her own commercial interests. The text is marked throughout with signs of professional ownership unusual for Victorian women. Scholars, historians, and archivists repeatedly refer to the Thomas sisters' text simply as *Psycho-Physical Culture*. This is partly due to a potentially misleading copyright page (Figure 4.1). However, if one examines two similar advertisements at the beginning and end of the text, it is clear that the product being advertised is "*Thomas Psycho-Physical Culture*" (my emphasis), a term which the sisters copyrighted in 1889. In fact, according to the advertisement at the end of the text, the "Conservatory of Thomas Psycho-Physical Culture and Elocution" had existed for fifteen years prior to the publication of the text and for twelve years before securing a copyright on the Thomas name. (Figure 4.2). While this type of commercialism has typically been attributed by historians to the materialistic excess of the Americanizers of Delsarte, it can also be seen as an attempt to protect a valuable professional name and clientele.
THOMAS

Psycho-Physical Culture

(Copyrighted)

BY

JULIA AND ANNIE THOMAS

FOUNDERS AND ORIGINATORS

Know ye not that ye are the Temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?
If any man defile the Temple of God him shall God destroy; for the Temple of God is holy, which Temple ye are.
1. CORINTHIANS III: 16, 17.

NEW YORK

EDGAR S. WERNER

1892

Figure 4.1. Copyright Page. From Thomas Psycho-Physical Culture (1892).
CONSERVATORY OF
Thomas Psycho-Physical Culture (Copy-
righted 1890)
NEW YORK CITY.
1892-93—SIXTEENTH YEAR.
Originators and Founders, JULIA AND ANNIE THOMAS.

THE PSYCHO-PHYSICAL DEPARTMENT
EMBRACES
2.  Emotional Indulgence—or oneness of Soul and Body.
3. Mental Indulgence—or oneness of Mind and Body.
4. Harmony of Indulgence—or oneness of Body, Soul and Mind.
5. Correction of abnormal (deformed or diseased) Psycho-Physical conditions.
6. Harmonious Psycho-Mental-Muscular-Action, combined with Lung-
power (responsive to each) conducive to the perfect development of
the Muscular, Respiratory, Circulatory and Nervous Systems. Same
applied to organs and functions.
7. Voice Training with action.
8. Posing (Statuesque, Gesticulatory). Repose.
9. Graceful Departure (Home—School—Street — Public Assemblies—
Receptions, etc., etc.).

DEPARTMENT OF ELOCUTION AND DRAMATIC ART
(CONSERVATORY COURSE) EMBRACES
1. Analysis and Classification.
3. Orthoepy.
4. Expression.
5. Literature.
6. Psychology and Sarcognomy.
7. Esthetics and Dramatic Science.

TERMS (INVARIABLY IN ADVANCE).
PRIVATE INSTRUCTION.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Single Lesson</th>
<th>$ 3.00</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Twenty-five Lessons</td>
<td>$25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifty Lessons</td>
<td>$50.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CLUB RATES.
No charge for Lessons to those organizing a Club or a Private Class.

| Club of Twenty-five (ten lessons), each | $10.00 |
| Club of Ten (ten lessons), each        | $5.00  |
| Club of Five (ten lessons), each       | $2.50  |

Teachers' Class, Fridays, 4:30 P.M.

Special attention is called to our Psycho-Physical (Copyrighted) Training department, a
grand reformatory system for the development of perfect Health, Strength and Grace. The
only method of correct basic training for the voice in speaking or singing. Every teacher
should understand its principles. It is attractive to the power of fascinating both young and
old. It has for its object Physical Perfection and true Personal Beauty, and can be practised
without difficulty. No apparatus necessary. Unparalleled success in correcting improper
habits of standing, round shoulders, curved spine and sunken chest, heart, lung, stomach
and nervous troubles.

Improvement guaranteed in every case. Pupils, of either sex, vary in age from 5 to 75.
Engagements made with Schools, Clubs, Churches, Unions, etc., in any State, for
courses of lessons, at reasonable terms.

Figure 4.2. Advertisement, Conservatory of Thomas Psycho-Physical Culture
and Elocution. From Thomas Psycho-Physical Culture (1892).

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status Delsartism afforded to women as professionals and entrepreneurs was rare in Victorian America, and it is an important aspect of Americanized Delsarte Culture that can easily be overlooked when we strip away or dismiss the claim of ownership from the Thomas’ text, conservatory, and system.

The Thomases were also at the center of a self-generated entrepreneurial community among women, parallels to which can be found in the advertisements of Werner’s Magazine. As a simple illustration of this aspect of Delsartism, we need only consider the final advertisement in the Thomas’s text, an advertisement for “Thomas Psycho-Physical Culture Association” founded in 1885 (Figure 4.3). With an executive committee of twelve women in New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and London, this association offered sources for interaction among dispersed members, and a means for building professional standards in much the same way MacArthur outlines for actors’ associations. In terms of women’s progress, such an association can also be seen as one component of what Mary Ryan, in Womanhood in America, identified as an interlocking web of women’s groups through which “[b]etween 1890 and 1920, women built a national organizational network that was nearly as sophisticated as the corporate business world” (204).

Once personal and professional status are established in these texts, that status is often used to gain respect for the system as a whole. This respect is encouraged by personal endorsement of effective teaching strategies or support for particular goals recognized as a valuable by these prominent Delsartians. For example, in defending the Delsarte system against charges from traditionalists, Stebbins calls upon her own

JULIA and ANNIE THOMAS, Founders.

1885.

"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you?" "If any man destroy the temple of God, him shall God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, whereof ye are." - 1 Corinthians, iii. 16, 17.

PRESIDENT.

Miss ANNA GREGORY THOMAS, New York City.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

Miss IDA KNAPP, New York City.
Miss ALEXA FREEMAN, Trenton, N. J.
Miss MARY OLIVER, Allegheny, Pa.
Miss MARGARET MANTON, New York City.

SECRETARY.

Miss MARY THOMAS, New York City.

TREASURER.

Miss ANNIE HILLTHORPE, New York City.

NAME.—The Thomas Psycho-Physical Culture Association.

OBJECT.—Realizing that these bodies are indeed temples of God, we purpose to do all in our power to act our own for, and to assist others in rendering theirs suitable residences for the Divine guest, to understand, to develop, to cultivate, refine and beautify the temple, and thus cheer, sustain and uphold the guiding power—the soul that dwells within.

SYMBOL.—The Badge—a red, a yellow and a blue ribbon knotted together. (Shades of colors on the cover of this book. Interpretation given below.)

The Ring or Pin—a ruby, a topaz and a sapphire set in triangle on a bar or band of gold.

MEMBERSHIP.—Anyone may become a member who desires, after taking a course of instruction from the President or from any licensed teacher.

TEACHERS.—It is required that recommendation from a licensed teacher or Member of the Executive Committee be presented with application to the President for examination for license to teach the system. A list of the names of licensed teachers furnished on application to the President.

INTERPRETATION OF COLORS EMPLOYED.

Red.—The Ruby.—Emblematic of the body, life, heat of the creative power, divine love. The red color of the blood has its origin in the action of the heart, which corresponds to or symbolizes love. Signifies care of the body.

Blue.—The Sapphire.—Emblematic of the mind, thought—expresses Heaven, the firmament, protection, constancy, fidelity, and symbolizes truth from a celestial origin. Signifies rationalization of the mind, study, thought, etc.

Yellow.—The Topaz.—Emblematic of the sun, the goodness of God, hope, faith, and symbolizes success or triumph of spirit over matter. Signifies culture of the soul, doing good to others, trusting in Divine Power.—JULIA AND ANNIE GREGORY THOMAS.

SUBJECTS FOR CONSIDERATION.

1. The Temple.—Construction: Skeleton; Joints: Muscular, Circulatory, Arterial; Venous and Nervous Systems; Digestion and Respiration; Special Senses, Voice, etc.


3. Air.—Ventilation, etc.

4. Food, Drink, Bathing.

5. Sleep.—Rest.

6. Exercise.—Recreation.

7. Mental Culture.

8. Social Culture.

9. Surroundings, Associations, etc.

10. Directions for the Care of the "Temple."

Figure 4.3. Advertisement and Description of the Thomas Psycho-Physical Culture Association. From Thomas Psycho-Physical Culture (1892).
authority, repeatedly and carefully established throughout the text, to defend the entire system. A typical example can be found in Chapter IX of The Delsarte System of Expression, entitled "Delsarte’s System Not Mechanical," in which she claims:

Some say that the greatest masters of histrionic art sneer at the method. Who are the greatest masters who so sneer? I studied under [Francois Joseph] Regnier in Paris, and I know his opinion; but he never had time or patience to study it.

Consequently he did not know in what its value consisted. (439)

In employing defenses which might serve to convince many segments of her readership, Stebbins often intertwines the professional and the fashionable, using both to ward off the detractors of the system. For example, to counter the charge that statue posing produces affectation Stebbins responds: “I reply from extensive personal experience as teacher of many years in seven of the most fashionable schools in New York, and say that there is not one atom of truth in the charge” (460) (my emphasis). By highlighting the fashionable qualities of these schools, Stebbins seems to be caught between two worlds: the professional world into which she and many of her fellow Delsartians are trying to gain access, and the world of the fashionable that consumed the energies of middle class Victorian women. Yet, Stebbins stood to gain by placing herself between these two worlds. When one considers the progressive message she puts forth through her writings, it seems plausible that Stebbins is also employing multiple strategies to further the cause of the system, selling herself and her colleagues as professionals and simultaneously employing the means to influence which are most readily available to her and her fellow women. Status-seeking through a “fashionable” reputation was an
acceptable domain for the middle and upper class Victorian woman, and thus could serve as a sphere in which her benign influence could be exercised.

4.5 The Assertive Voice of the Professional Delsartian Woman

Ultimately, all of this maneuvering can be seen as part of a larger call by the most outspoken Delsartians, particularly Stebbins, for women in this field to assert themselves instead of relying on authority or decorum for guidance. Stebbins repeatedly encourages her fellow teachers to be self-confident and resolute. She exhorts them to “Take the good wherever you can find it. Do not stop to consider whether Delsarte or any other man agreed with it” (406). In her effort to promote professionalism and high standards, not only does Stebbins argue that these Delsartians should forsake any advice that they judge not to be valid, even if it be her own or Delsarte's, but she also sets up an overt opposition to male authority. In doing so she implicitly defines her reader as the woman in opposition to the authority of the Victorian male. Stebbins sought for her reader, her profession, her art, and her fellow women the opportunity to acquire a free, unique voice. For women artists in the Victorian theatre establishment, answering this challenge was especially difficult. These circumstances made Stebbins' call to her colleagues all the more strident: “if we are to be real artists, we must understand the principles of our art, or we shall forever remain second-rate imitators” (452). By rejecting mere imitation, and seeking autonomy and power in artistic expression, Stebbins and other socially conscious Delsartians moved beyond Delsarte's mandate and promoted the system as a personal, professional, and societal means of liberation and self-fulfillment.
Not surprisingly, this agenda brought Stebbins into direct conflict with many men, even fellow admirers of Delsarte. She challenged those who worked in slavish devotion to Delsarte - male or female - or who treated him as infallible. She accused Reverend Alger, a longstanding friend of Steele MacKaye and one of the first advocates for Delsarte's theories in America, of an infatuation with Delsarte that clouded his judgement: "I am afraid that too much meditation on his favorite idol has created an intellectual hallucination in regard to Delsarte." (393). On the other side, she gave no quarter in her battle with those who underestimated the significance of Delsarte's work. In this regard, she attacked Silas S. Curry for reducing Delsarte in the same proportion by which Alger magnified him. Her ultimate conclusion regarding Curry's contribution to the Delsarte debate displays her biting humor and her willingness to invoke the religious sentiments that surrounded Delsartism as ammunition for her war of words: "I am afraid Mr. Curry was not intended by his Maker to understand Delsarte" (394). Her own more balanced, pragmatic approach to Delsarte's teaching belies the image, suggested by Banta and many theatre historians of Delsartian women flocking to a system as unquestioning disciples of a god-like master. She approaches his system as a colleague and fellow professional, one who claimed that "Like all other human beings, Delsarte was liable to err, and often made serious mistakes" (393). Through these admissions, she asserts her own independence of thought, critical judgment, and professional respect for the namesake of the system she espouses.
In her quest for the status of a professional, no other phenomenon raised the ire of Stebbins as much as the shroud of half-revealed or yet-to-be-known truth that surrounded Delsarte's system as it appeared in the United States:

To any intelligent outsider, Delsartism would seem to be the riddle of the Sphinx. All this unnecessary mystery and dark profundity has been caused by the repetition of foolish statements by two or three people. . . . They give the impression to the mass of uninitiated students that there is some great and priceless revelation behind the mysterious system Delsarte is supposed to have revealed to MacKaye.(395)

She ridicules male authorities like Curry, labeling them "self appointed judges" who claim MacKaye was the only one who could have revealed the truth of Delsarte. She rejected their argument that American Delsartism was crippled by the loss of great principles, leaving only the mechanical "system" behind. For Stebbins, no one man, not even MacKaye, could have the exclusive power to transmit Delsarte's so-called mysteries. Their worship of MacKaye she equates with a blind discipleship, arguing that for these unquestioning disciples the great truth "still remains concealed, like the alchemical enigma of the mystics, behind the abracadabra of its hierophant, MacKaye" (395-96). In unequivocal terms she dismisses such hero worship and mystery making and stakes a claim for her status alongside MacKaye rather than as a mere pupil of his:

There is absolutely nothing more to reveal than what has already been given to the world. I was too well acquainted with Mr. MacKaye not to know that if he had possessed any great secret he would have cashed its value to the public long
ago. I studied with him continuously for two years. In six months he had given me all that he himself knew, including all that he had received from Delsarte; and the last eighteen months of my study were filled with all sorts of variations and repetitions of the same knowledge. He candidly told me so, and further stated that I had exhausted the subject so far as he was concerned. (396)

Perhaps the unquestioning disciple disturbed Stebbins so deeply because he represents the model of authority that she knew would keep her students and all Delsartians in subjugation to patriarchal authority despite the advances encouraged by a more scientific approach to movement training. Her own stubbornness and refusal to allow others to dictate her choices about Delsartian philosophy and its application was frequently revealed in her advice to her students to avoid unquestioning obedience to any authority: “Use your common sense. . . . A little natural gumption is necessary in following any set of rules” (268). With these words and with many similar encouragements she called upon her fellow Delsartians to assert their own strength of will and to trust their own intelligence. In almost all of her writings Stebbins treated them not as subservient disciples, but rather as colleagues and professionals who owed no blind allegiance to her, a rigid set of trinities, or any other system of authority. As did any Delsartian, she subscribed to immutable laws of motion and expression, so this freedom was always intended to lead her students back to a singular vision of truth. However, the value she placed on the practical side of this exploration - encouraging physical exercises, gymnastics of expression, and fundamental concepts like breath support - outweighed the autocratic tendencies found in the most dogmatic Delsartians’ writings.
An examination of the Delsartian instructional texts at the heart of this study reveals their authors to be women who were surprisingly pragmatic professionals, valuing the practical contributions of "real workers" and the benefits of applying scientific principles to their work. The image of uncritical Delsartian women swept up in the emotion of the tableaus they posed or the scenes they acted is not supported by the best writing within these instructional texts. For example, Georgen cautions her actors to approach their craft along the lines of Diderot, and avoid succumbing to the emotions they are attempting to convey. She argues that Delsarte physical work aids the actor in her efforts to remain in control rather than encourages her to submit to an overwhelming emotion:

> when the physical form is correct . . . the actor . . . is enabled to lend all his mental and emotional being to the artistic rendering of the lines and thought of the author. . . . If the actor actually felt the true emotion, he would be so lost in himself that he would forget his audience, and so cease to be artistic. The study and aim of the artistic actor is to make the audience feel, not to be lost in his own emotions(120).

This dispassionate route followed by Diderot and later by Georgen could also be found in Stebbins' texts and training. She espoused a method in which practical exercises led to a greater understanding of the underlying principles of expression:

> The real value of Delsarte lies in the method of training, in the so-called esthetic gymnastics, not so much in the mechanical form of the exercises . . . the value
lies in the thorough understanding of the symbolism of motion and the laws of grace. (439)

While these seemingly arbitrary "laws of grace" remind one of the fluidity and smothering technical language of Wiebe's bureaucratic orientation, at their best these professional women tried to unite the discipline of a professional with the freedom of a student to discover the principles of Delsartism.

Stebbins, Bishop, the Thomas sisters, and other Delsarte teachers blended a visible technique, an important marker of the professional, with encouragement of the student's personal discovery of self and system. They frequently structured their exercises in Drill format or begin and end their exercises in drill style with phrases like "Attention!" Through these means they sought to impart a discipline similar to classical ballet and which is still employed in many modern actor training regimens - such as Tadashi Suzuki's work and Alba Emoting - designed to focus the actor upon the form of the exercise.15 Yet Stebbins was not likely to promote this style of drill in opposition to the flowering of natural ability: "The supremacy of genius is the necessity of labor; for there never was, perhaps, a period in which so many and so vain efforts have been made to replace it by study and toil" (159-60). She saw a clear value to rigorous study coupled with intuitive ability, arguing that "[n]o study can take the place of natural intuition . . . but study can prepare our instruments, perfect our tools" (91). She offered her clearest analogy in this regard when she affirmed her belief in the exercise drills, likening the relationship between drill and artistry to that of a pedestal and a statue, the
drill providing the solid foundation upon which the artists work could flourish (*DSOE* 400-01).

Undoubtedly, the professionalism of Second and Third Stage Delsartian women was compromised at best. It lacked clear standards, it was frequently a professionalism that grew out of a defensive response to critics of the system and its women adherents, it mingled past and present perspectives, and it relied on substitutes for rigorous applications of universalized methods and principles, including self-styled labels of ‘difficult” and “fashionable.” Nevertheless, many of these women found a way to negotiate a path between traditional benign influence of the Victorian domestic ideal of woman and the egalitarian model of professionalism that shaped progress in the status of American theatre and women’s rights throughout the twentieth-century.

**ENDNOTES**

1. The religious fervor of many of these reformers, as well as their sense of duty as cultural guardians, contributed greatly to this assertiveness as well. While the moral reform effort of several Delsartians were examined in Chapter 2, awareness of these issues also guides my examination in the third and fourth sections of this chapter.

2. One can argue for the likelihood that at least some of the sentiment expressed in these texts is due to a calculated choice by the authors to veil their professional status in the cloak of domesticity and Victorian decorum. Such an analysis of their writings would operate much in the same way as Banta’s analysis of the power implicit in male attempts to “contain” the image of women (88) or Auerbach’s argument that the subjugation of women is “a defensive response to this . . . self-transforming power surging beneath victimization” (*Woman and the Demon* 34).

3. McTeague, who presents profiles of eleven of the most prominent schools of the era makes an exception in this regard for the Stanhope-Wheatcroft school, arguing:
The entire method of teaching . . . was reminiscent of the traditions of a bygone era. Mrs. Wheatcroft apparently delighted in what teachers like Curry, Emerson, Sargent, MacKaye and Powers abhorred - imitation. Her entire system appears to have been based on the premise of the master-pupil relationship which Sargent so frequently maligned. (211)

4. Although there are accounts of nineteenth-century actor managers instructing women actors, as in Olive Logan's 1870 autobiography *Before the Footlights and Behind the Scenes*, these accounts are often presented for their humorous qualities rather than as a representation of the typical model of training. The reality was that there was seldom any “model” of training at all. The far more typical ad hoc arrangement in the stock company separated the genders through the expectation that the young male actors would imitate the established male actors of the company and the young female actors would imitate their established female counterparts.

5. As an example of this far-reaching influence consider the case of Emily Bishop, who taught “Americanized Delsarte” at the Chautauqua School of Physical Education. Ruyter estimates in the first eighteen years of that school’s existence, 1886-1904, it trained somewhere between 1200 and 1500 physical education teachers (“Reformers and Visionaries” 28). With these kinds of numbers from one institution, it is easy to see how information, and misinformation, about Delsarte’s teachings could have been popularized so quickly in such a short time.

6. Ironically, Baker presents many of the conventions popular in statue posing including a white makeup similar to that found in Georgen’s performance style. In an 1872 tableau entertainment entitled *Seven Ages of Life*, Baker takes his actors through seven tableaus in which they represent characters from classical scenes, including Virginus and his daughter. Actors are advised to imitate marble, and to wear costumes of “white unbleached cotton” while their flesh “should be thickly covered with white chalk” (6). In *The Sculptor’s Triumph* (1876), another collection of tableaus, Baker advises the stage manager that the performance will benefit greatly from “appropriate music for each tableau” (194). Yet many of the same conventions are ridiculed when placed in the service of American Delsartism. *The Grecian Bend* (1893) lampoons women statue posers, concluding that “there is but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous” (91), and depicting young girls dressed “in old fashioned style, made more ridiculous if possible” (87). Baker never clarifies the distinction between the supposedly sublime costumes for his tableau entertainments, such as *The Sculptor’s Triumph* and the ridiculous costumes for the women he denigrates.

7. This quote can be found in Stebbins’ Chapter IV, entitled “Modern or Practical Delsartism.” These two terms are used interchangeably by Stebbins throughout her writings and reinforce her pragmatic professionalism over her sentimental tendencies. The title of the Chapter also highlights the forward-thinking aspects of her philosophy,
which relies upon but also proceeds beyond the earlier sections of *The Delsarte System of Expression* devoted to the art of the ancient Greeks and Romans.

8. Stebbins’ statement also suggests that religious and mystical knowledge were as much a measure of professionalism of some advocates as was a thorough knowledge of anatomy.

9. Certainly there were incompetent and poorly trained teachers, but the frequency of historians’ discussions of these teachers may be due as much to the great attention they were given by the standard bearers of the system, like Stebbins, in the late nineteenth-century as it is due to the overwhelming numbers of these poor teachers. If so, then the existence of commentaries on these poor teachers may be evidence of the attempt to assert high standards for the profession, although historians typically overlook this aspect of the Delsarte phenomenon.

10. Such statements illustrate that “Grace” was considered a measurable quantity and served as one means to evaluate a student’s or a professional instructor’s mastery of the system. This runs counter to Martha Banta’s arguments that grace was primarily a means of making the Delsartian woman incorporeal. In Warman’s *Gestures and Attitudes*, an entire chapter is devoted to the benefits of grace for those individuals, primarily men, “engrossed in the every-day business affairs of life” (389). See Warman’s Chapter XXV: “Practical Thoughts for Practical Men.”

11. For additional warnings about unqualified teachers, see Stebbins *DSOE* 410-11. One of the most fascinating aspects of this passage is Stebbins’ intermingling of male and female gender pronouns. While this reflects the reality of her mixed-gender classes, it also puts men and women on equal footing in this emerging profession. Georgen’s use of pronouns is also significant, for in a text which is explicitly designed for men and women, and which includes illustrations for both men and women (see Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2), Georgen predominantly uses the feminine pronoun only, as in passages such as “The student should endeavor to create for herself . . .” (64) (my emphasis), defining the generic student as a woman and all but obliterating the male presence from this professional exchange.

12. Georgen’s statement can also be seen as a defense against the anticipated critics of women Delsartians as professionals. If their attack would be along the lines of a woman neglecting her duties to the family, then Georgen’s effort to tie together these two spheres can be seen as a skillful preemptive strike.

13. This intermingling of profession and fashion, and the utilitarian use of fashionable status would seem to complicate social historians’ analyses of Victorian women’s images in fashion, particularly Banta’s.
14. Curry, along with his teaching philosophy and his School of Expression in Massachusetts, is profiled in Chapter IV of McTeague’s *Before Stanislavski*.

Americanized Delsarte Culture applied the tenets of Francois Delsarte's System of Applied Aesthetics to all aspects of American life. No other society appropriated Delsarte's system in this way, and the causes for this uniquely American phenomenon can be traced to the turmoil of a rapidly changing American culture in the late nineteenth century. As Americans struggled to find order in a society that was experiencing profound shifts - including monopolization, incorporation, urbanization, and mass immigration - many sought comfort in totalizing belief systems that could adjust to a world in flux. In its American adaptations Delsartism was both totalizing and completely malleable, adjusting to the uncertainties of late nineteenth century American culture. It was used to defend American civilization and to criticize it, drew on an artistic tradition from antiquity, yet professed its modernism, and became a tool for pragmatic professionalism in physical training, yet did so in the flowery language of sentimentalism. Ironically, the same aspects of Delsartism criticized by most historians - its fluidity and malleability - were keys to its widespread popularity.

Another reason for this popularity was its usefulness as a vehicle for women who sought greater expressive possibilities in Victorian culture. Delsartism allowed middle and upper class women to seek greater freedom and control of their own bodies while remaining within the realm of polite society. With a culture in flux and a motivated
population of women teachers and advocates, Delsartism had a niche to fill in American culture and a discipleship to spread its Americanized gospel of social reform and liberation through physical awareness. Although Delsartian reformers were limited by the restrictive patriarchy of Victorian society, they found numerous ways to win partial victories for American women, and they laid foundations for the suffrage movement and feminist movement of the twentieth century.

By considering three spheres of influence most affected by the Delsartians’ efforts — social reform, performance, and professionalism — historians begin to recuperate the largely-ignored efforts of these women, and they are more likely to make sense of a phenomenon that continues to resist most scholars’ interpretations of the course of American theatre.

To find a place for American Delsartism, one has to be willing to look beyond the traditional boundaries of theatre scholarship. The influence of Delsartism was felt not only in the professional theatre school movement, but also in the elocutionary movement, the feminist movement, and in the emergence of modern dance in America. Late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century elocutionary training was shaped by Delsartians’ codification of gestures and their attention to the interconnectedness of mind, voice, and body. Feminists, too, can find in American Delsartism a system that promoted opportunities for women in social reform, performance, and the professional world. Although compromised by the constraints of the age and the contradictions of a society in tumult, the movement was a progressive force in each of these three areas. It paved the way for new conceptions of women and the woman’s body. Delsartians’
attention to the body in motion served a wide range of individuals, from public speakers to women who advocated liberation for the female body. It also shaped modern dance in profound ways that benefitted both dancers and actors in America. The influence of Delsartism on modern dance provides one of the best examples of the frequently-overlooked legacy of Delsartism in American theatre and actor training.

In her critique of modern dance, *Time and the Dancing Image*, Deborah Jowitt has claimed that Isadora Duncan's success was abetted by Delsartism. She argues that: “Delsarte had given the public a framework in which to consider new forms of dance. Isadora stretched that framework” (81). The system inspired the major innovators of dance in the early twentieth century, most notably Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis, whose Denishawn School and Company formed the basis for most of the modern dance styles and innovations of the twentieth century. In turn, the students of Denishawn inspired dance companies and university dance departments that would shape a significant portion of the physical training of actors in the twentieth century. In time, supported by the integration of dance and actor training, American acting theory and teaching would begin to embrace a physical approach as holistic in its intent as Delsarte's theories and the systems developed by his American followers.

Don McDonaugh has claimed that Denishawn was “quite simply the cradle of American modern dance.” The great pioneers of early modern dance, including Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Weidman were students of Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis. McDonaugh argues that even when these giants of modern dance appeared to break with their teachers at Denishawn, it is likely that they strategically “rejected the
sensibility of Denishawn” as part of their “sharp turn to the academic community for supportive audiences” (Sherman, editor’s forward, no pg no.). Both Shawn and St. Denis traced their techniques back to Delsarte and his American advocates. Denis claimed in her biography that she was inspired by a performance of Genevieve Stebbins, and Shawn praised Stebbins and her colleagues at length for their innovations and the challenges they posed to restrictive behavior and unhealthy fashion. Regarding Stebbins’ innovations, Shawn argued “Genevieve Stebbins had preceded Isadora Duncan in the wearing of ‘Greek’ costume, of appearing barefoot (or with soft sandals) and in demonstrating the fluid movement of the whole body in successions” (80–81). Shawn contextualized Stebbins’ rebellion against the restrictive decorum of the 1890s:

   The Victorian and Puritan influences were still so strong that a lady had face, hands, toes – and in between was a mysterious region never referred to in polite society, and never to be shown or seen except by the lady herself in completely protected privacy” (81). (author’s emphasis)

The Delsarte system formed a foundation for Denishawn training as well as its founders’ choreographic vocabulary. Jane Sherman and Barton Mumaw described Denishawn technique as a “combination of ballet, Delsarte, Dalcroze, and ethnic movements that Shawn devised. From the interaction of these techniques emerged Denishawn dancing, which freed ballet from rigid bonds and westernized Oriental traditional dance to adapt to our sturdier, less pliable American bodies” (315).

   Sherman attributes Graham’s technique of contraction and release to the “Delsartean inspiration . . . she had learned from Shawn” (87). Likewise, dance historian
Deborah Jowitt has argued that “Humphrey’s later classification of movements as occurring in opposition, succession, or parallel to each other seems to be rooted in Delsarte theory” (161n). These techniques in turn influenced later performers and teachers in modern dance, who taught not only dancers but actors as well. As dance training developed in both university and non-university settings, the modern dancer’s use of the body, inspired in large part by Delsartism, began to be incorporated into the training of actors. Dance has become an accepted part of actor training in both the Stanislavskian approach and in approaches to non-realism, ranging from the theories of Antonin Artaud to the physical training program and performance style of Anne Bogart. Furthermore, many of the most influential theorists of the twentieth century, Grotowski included, offer direct references to Delsarte’s theories as influences on their explorations (Grotowski 253).

The historian can only speculate about the lost opportunities that resulted from the collective amnesia of American theatre practitioners. Modern dance became the primary repository of Delsartian insights primarily because American theatre artists cast aside the insights of Delsartians in favor of the radical shift toward psychological introspection that eventually coalesced in Strasberg’s Method approach. Clark Rogers called attention to this shortcoming in American acting instruction as early as 1973:

Our institutional programs are plagued by a tendency to follow one craze after another with exaggerated zeal. Our devotion to Delsarte was followed by an infatuation with Stanislavski, which has been replaced in recent years by a mania for Grotowski. These fads represent a serious defect in our development. (8)
This devaluation of history seems especially true in regard to Delsarte and his American disciples. In a 1978-79 survey of American movement educators, Carol Ann Schreiber found among movement teachers a "general lack of familiarity . . . regarding the theories of Delsarte" (202). Any effort to understand Delsartism and its impact on American culture and American theatre has to account for Delsartism's widespread cultural significance and not simply evaluate it as a “failed” movement regimen for actors. If we work to better understand the historical context and the insights of Delsarte’s American advocates, then we take a significant step toward moving beyond the “faddish” pedagogy Clark criticized and toward more intelligent training drawn from a rich tradition of inquiry.

In 1893 Eleanor Georgen told her students: “it should be our aim to be simply our honest, cultivated selves, without that constant repression of feeling so evident in many individuals” (119). It is hard to imagine she was speaking to these students as actors only. The effort of instructors like Georgen, Stebbins, Bishop, and the other leaders of this movement was, in simplest terms, to free the whole person through an idealized vision of “the true” and “the beautiful.” Surely their effort was flawed by excessive sentiment and pseudo-scientific language, and it was hemmed in by the limitations of a patriarchal Victorian society in crisis. Nevertheless, it was a noble pursuit that the modern, compartmentalized practitioner of the arts — hemmed in by the constraints of inadequate finances, insufficient time, and an American culture that too quickly disregards the honest artist and the cultivated individual — overlooks at his or her own peril.
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