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QUIET VICTORY: THE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AMERICAN WOMEN FORGED THROUGH DELSARTISM

Joseph Fahey

Many American women viewed the “Americanized” version of Delsartism as a means for them to assert a professional identity that was unusual for the Victorian era. The author explores the limitations of current theater scholarship in regard to the complexity of the Delsarte system as a cultural phenomenon, and to argue for its role in encouraging a professional orientation for women. To better understand the support Delsartism lent to the professional aspirations of its female adherents and the backlash those adherents encountered, he considers several key Delsarte training manuals and examines two of the most popular lampoons written to ridicule American Delsartism. The efforts of women to forge a professional identity through Delsartism represent a quiet victory for American women at the turn of the century and an important advance in American theater training.

From the 1870s through the early years of the twentieth century, American Delsartism was—in hundreds of variations and adaptations—an extremely popular and influential American training system for actors, elocutionists, and people from all walks of life who were interested in aesthetics and deportment. It was also a training system that, unlike any other in the history of American theater, was dominated by women. The Delsarte manuals of the 1880s and 1890s demonstrate an emerging and often outspoken professional consciousness among their women authors coupled with strident and at times sophisticated arguments for embracing Delsartism as a means of liberation through movement. Many American women viewed this “Americanized” version of Delsartism as a means for them to assert a sense of self-control, self-possession, and freedom unusual for the Victorian era. The most influential Delsarteans challenged corsets, paternalistic medical prejudice,

Drawing by François Delsarte.

François Alexandre Nicolas Delsarte Papers, Mss. 1302, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA

and limitations imposed upon women's role in the great affairs and daily commerce of the nation. To advance these goals 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. My purpose in this paper is to reveal the complexity of this system as a cultural phenomenon and its role in encouraging a professional orientation for women. To better understand the support Delsartism lent to the professional aspirations of its female adherents, I will consider several key Delsarte training manuals and examine two of the most popular lampoons written to ridicule American Delsartism. The efforts in the former, to evoke a sense of professionalism, and in the latter, to ridicule the professional Delsartean teacher, represent opposing forces in late nineteenth century America.

In my opinion, the progressive professional orientation stimulated by American Delsartism has been typically overlooked by theater historians for three basic reasons. First, it occurred in the turmoil of late nineteenth-century American culture, a time that is notoriously difficult for historians to come to terms with.¹ Secondly, the professionalism the Delsarteans exhibited was idiosyncratic in its nature. This idiosyncratic nature is not surprising, considering that these women had no established professional model or network to rely upon. Thirdly, the professional capabilities of these women are at times masked by the sentimental prose and the technical jargon of most Delsartean texts. To work through the many volumes of this material is daunting, but it is vital that we understand the professionalism present within these writings both for its cultural implications and for the fact that it illustrates the union of American Delsartism, its women adherents, and the emerging theater school movement of the late nineteenth century.²

Making sense of the professionalism encouraged by Delsartism poses many challenges, and its nature as professionalism is difficult to assess, emerging as it does from the work of Delsartean instructors who not only lacked clear standards for their profession, but were unable to gain equal access to more traditional means of professional identity, such as apprenticing in the theater. The most successful Delsartean practitioners used lofty, moralizing, grandiose language, yet were defensive and competitive entrepreneurs. Several, most notably Genevieve Stebbins, united a search for higher standards with self-promotional status-seeking. These facets of American Delsartism were a key part of the emerging professionalization of American actor training and also represented a form of competitive entrepreneurship unusual for Victorian women. Ultimately, the professional orientation found in Delsarte training texts reveals an assertive voice coming from Delsartean women that is at odds with the picture painted of them by lampoonists and critical scholars.

The Problem of Finding a Cultural Framework

A typical theater student of the last fifty years would likely encounter the contributions of François Delsarte (1811–1871) as a passing, usually derogatory, reference in an introduction to theater text. Theodore Hatlen's widely respected *Orientation to the Theater* is typical. Hatlen rejected Delsarte's approach as part of an "artificial and external school of acting...based on purely mechanical techniques" (236). These references also immediately precede and are contrasted to the section of the text devoted to Konstantine Stanislavsky and a more "natural" or "modern" approach to acting.³ Much of this negative assessment is due to the power of images over words. Pictorial representations of systems derived from Delsarte (Figure 1) frequently overshadow the more subtle and complex aspects of his writings. In the broad scope of his teachings, 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 "[t]o each spiritual function responds a function of the body" (qtd. in Stebbins 1902, 67),⁴ is a dictum that has found application in the teachings of many respected theater and movement artists, including Vsevolod Meyerhold, Jerzy Grotowski, and Rudolf von Laban. After Delsarte's death in 1871 Steele Mackaye (1842–1894), a celebrated American theater practitioner who studied with 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 lectures or even in his professional theater schools. Instead, the most frequent contact the public had with Delsartism came from the innumerable 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 and other Delsartean performance forms.⁵

In *Reformers and Visionaries*, dance historian Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter lays out three distinct phases of American Delsartism: 1) the 1870s 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).⁶ This expanded version of Delsartism, sometimes referred to as "psycho-physical culture" has been little-explored. It consists mostly of the efforts of the women advocates of American Delsartism.

While Ruyter's three-part model is useful in distinguishing types of Delsarte-based activity, the chronological development implied by Ruyter's phases can be misleading. Aspects of these three Delsartean spheres of

Figure 1

A Chart of Delsarte-based Expressions adapted from Giraudet.

Ted Shawn. Every Little Movement. 1963. p. 45.

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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 theater school that would build “character, morality, aesthetics, and religion” (qtd. in Mackaye I, 159). Furthermore, the prominent minister William R. Alger was one of the earliest American promoters of Delsarte’s system, arguing for its ability to advance the moral reform of society. Likewise, the 1893 text *The Delsarte System of Expression* by one of the most successful Delsarte teachers, Eleanor Georgen—of the American Academy of Dramatic Art—was as much a treatise on acting theory and technique as it was an examination of general Delsartean culture. Nevertheless, Ruyter’s three-phase division is useful when evaluating the primary focus of each Delsartean’s instructional text. By this measure most Delsartean shared the priorities of the second and third phases in Ruyter’s model.

A sampling of the work of Genevieve Stebbins, the most prominent of these second stage and third stage Delsartean, reveals a breadth of inquiry and a continually expanding scope of activity.⁷ Stebbins was the most prodigious student of Steele Mackaye in the 1870s. From the late 1870s through 1907, 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 the *Werner’s* magazines, the mouthpiece for American Delsartism from 1879 to 1902. 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 Mackaye until their rivalry led to a fiercely competitive mutual antipathy. No other Delsartean published as much as she did; her articles and reviews of her books appeared frequently in *Werner’s*, and modern dance pioneer Ruth St. Denis wrote about Stebbins’ influence on her work. She often acted like a revolutionary within the Delsarte system, free to assess the limitations of the system and its originator. This independence is illustrated in her critiques of Delsarte and of 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. (Stebbins 1902, 399)

Figure 1

A Chart of Delsarte-based Expressions adapted from
Giraudet, *Ted Shawn*. *Every Little Movement*. 1963. p. 45.

She also made it quite clear that in America *she* carried the torch that Delsarte's star pupil 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*. (ibid. 382 n)

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

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

Ultimately, her self-confidence bordered on self-aggrandizement, leading her to suggest *hers* 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" (ibid. 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. She developed the medium of statue posing, articulating an exacting set of standards for her own version, which she dubbed "artistic statue posing." Consequently, Ruyter argues that Stebbins, the first to feature non-verbal expression in Delsartean public performance, could be considered *the* pioneer of statue posing, accompanying drills, pantomimes, dances and dance-dramas that comprised typical Delsartean performances (1996, 72).⁸ In statue posing and elsewhere Stebbins and her fellow Delsartean, the overwhelming majority of whom were women, shaped the system to serve their own purposes.

As at least one scholar has pointed out, Delsarte contended 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, expanding the potential applications of Delsartism became a defining characteristic of the movement. Delsarte's System of Applied Aesthetics became the basis for not only the arts but for every aspect of culture. Emily Bishop, popular Chautauqua teacher of a Delsarte-based health regimen, 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. (199–200)

This democratic search for a broader application led to a modified system, social and political in nature, with heretofore unheard of professional opportunities for women. By the turn of the century, Americanized Delsarte Culture represented a culture largely of, by, and for women.

Delsarte Scholarship

Most theater scholars have failed to take into account the social and political nature of American Delsartism. Historians face many difficulties in their efforts to come to terms with this complex and often contradictory movement. Traditional theater historians have often concluded that the teachings of the “Americanizers” of Delsarte were irrelevant, dangerous, or hopelessly corrupted in their social, political, or commercial contexts. The primary Delsarte scholar of the first half of the twentieth century, Claude Lester Shaver, 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* (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” (ibid.). 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” (216). Yet to dismiss the Americanized versions of Delsartism as “routine mechanical systems,” as Shaver does, denies the complexity of the machine image and of concepts like “mechanical” in late nineteenth century life.⁹ 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, social historian Alan 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 perceived mechanical nature of some 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, theater 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.¹⁰

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, from the late 1940s to the mid 1960s, Delsartism elicited critiques like those of teacher and theater historian Edwin Duerr. Duerr wrote in his 1962 survey text, *The Length and Depth of Acting*, that Delsarte was little more than a fanatical classifier. Duerr ultimately 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 the theories of the French originator of “The Theater of Cruelty” Antonin Artaud (1896–1948), and the “Poor Theater” practices of Jerzy Grotowski (1933–99), as well as their American adaptors in the Living Theater and the Open Theater, corresponded with a reappraisal of Delsartism among a number of theater scholars.¹¹ By the 1970s a few theater educators and practitioners began to advocate the reconsideration of Delsarte for modern training purposes. In his March 1972 article, “Delsarte: Three Frontiers” 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 Stanislavsky-based training (64–67). Kirby then presented to his readers a modified version of Delsartean exercises as a regimen for modern actors. Since his article appeared, others have advocated applications of Delsarte in contrast to the mainstay of most modern acting curricula: Stanislavsky-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 *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 theater. (98)

Such a “tentative” reconsideration would seem to open the door for a wide range of inquiries, but any rethinking of Delsarte’s application to modern training has not included the women who brought his system to widespread popularity in the United States. Theater scholars have written little about the exercises or philosophies of his American followers. The most prominent exception to this is Ruyter’s work; however, Ruyter’s research is focused on modern dance rather than theater.

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 actor training. While Clarke’s comparison of Delsarte’s teachings to twentieth-century acting

texts reveals the debt the latter owe to the Delsarte-Mackaye system, she reinforces the belief that the only Delsarteans who merit study are the few gifted educators like Mackaye who implanted Delsartism in America. Clarke labels the second generation of Delsarteans, 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 argues for acknowledgment of the beneficial influence of Delsarte on modern American actor training. In her opinion, Delsarte, Eurythmics creator Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, and movement notation pioneer 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 Schreiber’s 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).¹² Schreiber unfairly derides those facets of Delsartism not directly linked to an artist’s training, and it denies the rich mystical, historical, and liberating elements of artistic statue posing as Stebbins envisioned it.¹³

In the last decade additional theater 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 on professional training practices of Genevieve Stebbins, Eleanor Georgen (who headed Delsarte training at the American Academy of Dramatic Art), or even Steele Mackaye—or the political and social progressiveness of Emily Bishop—and so many others, fit into this history? Tabish manages to avoid these contributions of Delsarte's disciples in favor of a reductive history of American acting that identifies Stanislavsky'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 twenty years have refined scholars' knowledge of the work of François Delsarte and its effect on American acting.¹⁴ Alongside Ruyter's *Cultivation of Body and Mind* (1999), by far the most comprehensive study of this kind from theater scholars is James McTeague's *Before Stanislavsky: American Professional Acting Theory 1875–1925* (1993).¹⁵ 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 cultural framework for Delsarte in America, his study opens the door to wider examinations of Delsarte's influence in America. In *Actors and American Culture, 1880–1920* (1984), 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 schools of acting and Delsarte's theories 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 professional training, but also in other aspects of American culture. His concern with the actor as a cultural icon promotes a reconsideration of the culture that creates and supports the professional actor and often becomes obsessed with that actor as a personality. The Delsartean's training model for the individual and the artist, and their awareness of the potential political, social, and cultural power of their system,

offer 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.

Ruyter's, McTeague's, and MacArthur's texts afford excellent opportunities to reconsider the place of Delsartism in American culture. With the disproportionate attention given to Delsartean pseudo-scientific charts of the emotions, "Delsarte corsets," "Delsarte wooden legs," and "Greekish" high society affairs, it is not surprising that progressive, balanced, and politically and culturally-aware scholarship about serious use of the system has been slow to move forward. To look beyond the 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 chart a path of progressive reform within a powerfully conservative society and an evolving professionalism in American theater training.

Delsartians as Professionals

In the nineteenth century, American theater served as a relatively receptive forum for professional woman, as evidenced by the successful careers of Anna Cora Mowatt, Olive Logan, Charlotte Cushman, Elizabeth Robbins and many other actresses. In contrast, however, the women of the second and third stages of Delsartism have not been written into the history of the professionalization of American theater. In spite of that omission, their texts and careers illustrate that the best of these teachers were teaching in the leading theater 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 benefited women enormously, and the belittling of their efforts by male theater practitioners and educators emboldened many of these Delsartians to speak with an assertiveness foreign to the domestic ideal of Victorian womanhood. A reconsideration of their work reveals many contributions of the Delsartean authors to the professionalization of American actor training and offers insights into the struggle for greater opportunities for Victorian women in the professional world. Shaped by the limited opportunities for independent women in late Victorian-era American life, this professional orientation 1) was veiled by sentimental language, 2) supported greater professional opportunities for women through school-based training, 3) emerged in part as a defensive response to attacks on the system and the women promoting it, 4) developed as a hybrid form of status-seeking that was both profession-oriented and self-promotional, and 5) fed an unusual assertiveness in Delsartean women.

The Veiled Professional Orientation

The professional earnestness present in the writings and teachings of many Delsartians is frequently coded or veiled in ways that obscure it from the casual reader of these instructional materials. Historians may be misled by the tone of these instructional texts and the articles found in Werner's. Even the most progressive Delsartians wrote in the idiom of sentimentalism or could be swept up in the religious fervor that fueled their convictions about this system. However, their seemingly unprofessional statements often had a very pragmatic purpose, and were 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)¹⁶

Though it reads as sentiment, and at first seems of questionable value to practical-minded historians of theater training, Stebbins actually here 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 beyond the sentimental prose of the 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. It thus promotes a more egalitarian vocational and avocational call to women to take up this work. A similar intention can be found in the preface to Emily Bishop's 1895 *Self Expression and Health: 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 reader of Stanislavsky is familiar with his fictional student in *An Actor Prepares* and the other seminal texts that introduced his methods to English-speaking actors. Similar rhetorical techniques continue to be found in acting texts today. For example, Richard Brestoff, in his 1995 *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 work Brestoff deliberately employs a strategy intended to capture and hold the widest possible readership among those considering a career in the theater. 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 narrow minded for modern scholars to conclude that Stebbins' use of a similar type of informality is any less calculated, shrewd, or professional.

Opportunities in the Professional Theater Schools

As has been charted by James McTeague, Fred C. Blanchard, and most notably, Benjamin MacArthur, the emergence of acting schools contributed greatly to the professionalization of American theater in the late nineteenth-century. 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.¹⁷ Professional theater 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 theater training in the 1890s, the same decade that saw the emergence of the monopolistic practices of the Theatrical Syndicate, a booking agency that squeezed out competitors across the country and encouraged a commercial sameness for theatrical offerings from New York to San Francisco (Blanchard 619). The decentralizing effect of these schools came decades before the height of the Little Theater Movement and the Community Theater Movement in the 1920s, and its impact was felt half a century before the emergence of the current network of professional regional theaters in the United States in the late 1940s. By replacing the apprentice system and decentralizing instruction, theater schools offered unprecedented opportunities for women across the country.

Both the structure of the early acting schools and the American training systems based on Delsarte's teachings provided women in American theater a more equitable relationship to men than could be expected under the apprenticeship system that had ruled the theater in the stock company era of the mid-nineteenth century. 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.¹⁸ 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 theater 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 in 1879, and Mary Blood and Ida Riley, who founded the Columbia School of Oratory, Physical Culture, and Dramatic Art in Chicago in 1890. With enrollment figures from most of these schools, including the American Academy of Dramatic Art, indicating that students were more likely to see women than men as their classmates and with women serving as founders and instructors in these schools, a quiet cultural revolution in actor training was underway.

Such changes represented a profound shift in American theater and in the role of women as professionals within that theater. Perhaps no more tangible illustration of the new opportunities can be offered than the school-centered career of one of the most prominent Delsartean 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 theater school community and the Delsartean 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, another pioneer of the acting school model of actor training, 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” and opposed to 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 was teaching in a technique-based school with the modern mission of analyzing scripts down to “the grammatical construction of the author’s sentence” for justification of students’ acting choices. Her Delsartean 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 of the old apprentice system.

The Defensive Nature of Delsartean Professionalism

In large part, the attention to professionalism among leading Delsartean arose out the defensive position they found themselves in at the end of the nineteenth-century. Doubtless many established men of the theater found the swelling of the ranks of Delsartean women a difficult phenomenon to understand, and judged it either unworthy of serious consideration or a danger to be stopped. The inability to find a place for these women propelled criticisms of the system as a whole, so that by the 1890s both the Americanization of Delsartism, which by that time largely meant the feminization of Delsartism, and the women who advocated new applications of Delsarte’s philosophy were labeled perversions or absurdities by more traditional teachers like Silas S. Curry and by lampoonists like George M. Baker, author of *The Seldarte Craze*. In response, prominent Delsartean women like Stebbins and Georgen 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. Standards could be especially important in these early years because one teacher could have a far reaching and profound influence on an entire profession.¹⁹ Stebbins’ and Georgen’s efforts to create a professional consciousness among Delsarte teachers can best be understood when considered as a defensive response to male attacks on a feminized form of Delsartism.

In traditional circles anti-Delsartism attacks and misogynist sentiments were frequently interwoven. This can be illustrated by considering the anti-Delsartean 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 1880s and 1890s. The nontraditional role of women functioning here as independent professionals, and often as entrepreneurs, perhaps colors the perception of women like Stebbins, Georgen, and Bishop among more established male teachers of acting and elocution and in the theater 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 he gives Mackaye some credit for this new understanding, Curry quickly distinguishes between his serious work and the work of his followers. In Curry's opinion, 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). Although Mackaye spoke of universal applications at great length, Curry always distinguishes between Mackaye and the "so-called Delsartians" he saw as corrupting the system. By the conclusion of *The Province of Expression* Curry critiques the current state of Delsartism as having become so polluted with sentimentality—a term frequently used in the late nineteenth century to describe the trivial affairs of women²⁰—that he deems it a barely recognizable perversion of the original Delsarte system:

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)

Curry presents a telling 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 unnerved Curry was the idea of a room full of seemingly drunk women. But even if we grant that the exercise is silly, it hardly illustrates that all the Delsartean women and their students were perverse

in their training. Lacking any objective measure of the work of these women, Curry offers instead a gross mischaracterization of the efforts of the best Delsartean teachers.

Within the theater this conservative attack on Delsartism found its most public voice in the plays of George M. Baker, the era's most prolific and successful writer of plays for amateurs.²¹ In his plays Baker seems at least as concerned about the Delsartians' gender as he is about their teachings. Fear of the potential threat posed by Delsartism to traditional perceptions of motherhood runs through several of his popular plays. Baker's most famous lampoonings of American Delsartism are his 1887 farce *Forty Minutes With a Crank, or The Seldarte Craze*, and his 1893 play *The Grecian Bend*. In both plays Baker relies upon patriarchal assumptions and misogynist stereotypes to resist the theatrical and professional ambitions of women. Numerous scholars have cited these texts, particularly *The Seldarte Craze*, as evidence of the ridicule Delsartism had earned by the 1890s. However, not understanding the gender biases that drive the attacks in Baker's texts, such scholars distort the relevance of the lampoons to the eventual demise of Delsartism. 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 impression of Delsartism that may have been held by the general population. Throughout Baker's plays, rather than specific criticisms against Delsartism, his primary concern seems to be that the system leads young women astray. This is the central issue in *The Grecian Bend*, and it is repeatedly emphasized in *The Seldarte Craze*.²²

In Baker's *The Seldarte Craze*, several women pupils are the victims of crazed "Professor Archimedes Abbott, Principal of the Realistic School of Expression," a thinly veiled assault on Steele Mackaye and the Lyceum School, his first Delsarte-based theater school. While Baker's primary target in *The Seldarte Craze* is Mackaye, he 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 at worst they are naive, talentless 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 these defeated and reformed women, Baker suggests that the women who took up Delsartism did so because of false ambitions, and a naïveté 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.

In his send-up of Stebbins’ style of statue posing, *The Grecian Bend*—a title that mocks the pseudo-Grecian outfits worn by these women performers as they embodied classical statues—Baker shifts the target of his attack from the early schools to the later phenomenon, dominated by women, of statue-posing. 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 the request of Suzy, a friend of her daughter’s, to engage with the Field sisters in 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 Delsarteans 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 Delsarteans, diminish their exercises as a passing “fashion,” and restore the patriarchal order advocated by Mrs. Field, the conformist model of motherhood.

As a response to this kind of negative image of women Delsarteans, Stebbins and her colleagues refuted specific charges and attempted to improve the overall image of the movement and the women associated with

it. In many of their statements they attempt to balance deference to Delsarte and their own professional assertiveness. A frequent charge leveled against the Delsartians, by George M. Baker then and by Garff B. Wilson and others in the 1960s and later, 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 and sod the 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. (Stebbins 1902, 138)

In her choice of an excerpt from Delsarte's writings as well as the analogy she presents her reader, Stebbins articulates her allegiance to the basic tenets of Delsartism. She also confirms her strong belief in the benefits of practice and drill in the American exercises, many of which she developed. 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.

Attacks from established male authorities like Reverend William R. Alger, one of the most visible advocates of Delsarte's ideas in America and one of Mackaye's original supporters, often focused women Delsartians' calls for higher standards for their profession. As part of a long-standing feud with Alger, some of Stebbins' writings reveal a defensiveness and a desire to clarify the extent of her own knowledge. For example, regarding Alger's stress on the religious basis of Delsarte's teachings in relation to scholasticism 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. (1902, 392n)²³

Her lament here about the lack of appreciation among Delsartians for church teaching in relation to Delsartism is only one of many such calls Stebbins and the other leading Delsartians issued for the highest standards for their profession.²⁴ Stebbins often traced the misconceptions the general public held regarding Delsartism to the supposed prevalence of 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).²⁵

Stebbins and others argued for professional standards in every aspect of Delsartean 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 Delsartian [sic] 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 such 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)²⁶ She expects a good teacher to be a "living demonstration" of her 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 commercially-oriented population of teachers within Delsartism that may have embraced these teachings 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 Delsartean 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)²⁷

Stebbins apparently felt that some 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 not employed in most actor training during Stebbins' lifetime.

While practicality, knowledge, and grace were key professionalizing concepts for Stebbins, Eleanor Georgen in *The Delsarte System of Physical Culture* (1893) reveals that "freedom" and "difficulty" became ill-defined but nevertheless powerful measures of professionalism for her. 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. She explains: "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 rigidity, 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 Delsartean or the stage performer, but for the emerging population of professional women in all areas of public life.

Interwoven with Georgen's 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 children who move naturally. 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 the liberated Delsartean woman 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. (73–4)²⁸

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 of Victorian motherhood.²⁹ 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 most readily apparent 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 Delsartean 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 by professional Delsartean women on the traditional spheres of influence for women.

The Professional and The Self Promotional

The minimal hierarchy and infrastructure among "professional" Delsarte instructors and the competitive nature of the schools and private studios where Delsarte instruction was offered led teachers to combine claims of legitimacy as professionals with proclamations of their "fashionable" status. This intermingling of values drew on a traditional realm of influence for Victorian women—their ability to determine "the fashionable"—and it took two basic forms: competitive, the promotion of an individual's teaching as better than that of her fellow Delsartean; and collective, promotion of the system as a whole. Both strategies indicate that, despite the lack of clear criteria

for standards, a professional identity served Delsartean as individuals and as a group, and that both forms of professional identity were firmly in place throughout the 1890s.

The competitive, entrepreneurial model of status-seeking can be seen in many Delsartean efforts to promote their own “fashionable” studios, instructional methods, or schools. With a dizzying array of applications, methods, and claims for Delsartism among its many adherents and advocates, the leaders of the Delsartean community of women found themselves caught between the desire to advance practical, beneficial training, and the need to promote their own reputations among prospective students and competing teachers. 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 the individuals instructors associated with them. Even Stebbins, arguably the most self-assured and comprehensively educated Delsartean, partakes of this status seeking and self-promotion. Her frequent recognitions of her own discoveries and her contributions to Delsartism border on self-aggrandizement. This is readily apparent from her efforts in *The Delsarte System of Expression* 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. (Stebbins 1902, 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 Delsartean to do this on the line of artistic investigation” (446). Her deliberate attempt to identify herself as a “Delsartean” here and elsewhere is also noteworthy as part of a larger project to build a common identity among 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 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. Indeed, in a nebulous professional environment shaped by competition with few rules and no oversight, distinguishing oneself from one’s peers may have been the only way to argue for one’s merits.

It is also not surprising to see these efforts in other texts besides those of 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 testified 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)

The endorsement of perhaps the most respected individual in the rapidly modernizing profession of actor training is significant not only for the prominence of its location at the beginning of Georgen's text, but also because it signals a fundamental shift away from the individualized, idiosyncratic training of the apprentice system and toward an ostensibly 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. Sargent 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.

The Delsarte-based *Thomas Psycho-Physical Culture* (1892), by Julia and Annie Thomas, offers one of the clearest examples of private commercial studio entrepreneurs developing a text, an instructional system, and a professional association to advance their own commercial interests. The text is marked throughout with signs of professional ownership unusual for Victorian women (Figure 2). Advertisements at the beginning and end of the text also make 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 3). This type of commercialism has been

Figure 2

Copyright Page.

Julia and Annie Thomas. Thomas Psycho-Physical Culture. 1892.

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

CONSERVATORY OF
Thomas Psycho-Physical Culture (Copy-
 righted 1889) **and Elocution,**
 NEW YORK CITY.
 1892-93 — SIXTEENTH YEAR.

Originators and Founders. *JULIA AND ANNIE THOMAS.*

THE PSYCHO-PHYSICAL DEPARTMENT

EMBRACES

1. Analysis—Physical Perfection and Personal Beauty.
2. a. Emotional Influence—or oneness of Soul and Body.
 b. Mental Influence—or oneness of Mind and Body.
 c. Harmony of Influence—or oneness of Body, Soul and Mind.
3. Correction of abnormal (deformed or diseased) Psycho-Physical conditions.
4. 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.
5. Voice Training with action.
6. Posing (Statuesque, Gesticulatory). Repose.
7. Graceful Department (Home—School—Street—Public Assemblies—Receptions, etc., etc.).

DEPARTMENT OF ELOCUTION AND DRAMATIC ART

(CONSERVATORY COURSE) EMBRACES

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Analysis and Classification. | 4. Expression. |
| 2. Mechanics. | 5. Literature. |
| 3. Orthoëpy. | 6. Psychology and Sarcognomy. |
| 7. Esthetics and Dramatic Science. | |

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PRIVATE INSTRUCTION.

Single Lesson,	\$ 5 00
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CLUB RATES.

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

Club of Twenty-five (ten lessons), each	\$10 00
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Club of Five (ten lessons), each	25 00

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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 spines and sunken chests, heart, lung, stomach and nervous troubles.

Improvement guaranteed in every case. Pupils, of either sex, vary in age from 1 to 75. Engagements made with Schools, Clubs, Churches, Unions, etc., in any State, for courses of lessons, at reasonable terms.

attributed by some historians to the materialistic excess of the Americanizers of Delsarte. For example, Leslie Carol Schreibner argues for a uniquely American approach to Delsartism, but she highlights the most extreme examples of the commodification of Delsartism:

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)

While the wooden leg reference is amusing, it overshadows the more widespread and significant role of Delsartism as a means to professional entrepreneurship for women who owned private studios and taught Delsartism for profit in many parts of the country. The efforts of the Thomas sisters to control the labeling of their brand of Delsarte training can be seen as an attempt to protect a valuable professional name and clientele. The 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 also placed themselves at the center of a self-generated entrepreneurial community among women, parallels to which can be found in the advertisements of Werner’s magazines. As a simple illustration of this aspect of Delsartism, one needs only to consider the final advertisement in the Thomas’s text, an advertisement for “Thomas Psycho-Physical Culture Association” founded in 1885 (Figure 4). 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 Benjamin MacArthur outlines for actors’ associations.³⁰ 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 professional status was established by these texts, it was often used to gain respect for the system as a whole. Such respect was encouraged by personal endorsement of effective teaching strategies or support for particular goals recognized as valuable by these prominent Delsarteans.

Figure 3

Advertisement for Conservatory.

Julia and Annie Thomas. Thomas Psycho-Physical Culture. 1892.

The T. P. P. C. Association.

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 defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are."—*I. Corinthians*, iii. 16, 17.

PRESIDENT.

Miss ANNIE GREGORY THOMAS, New York City.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

Miss IDA KNAPP, New York City.
 Miss ALICE FREEMAN, New York City.
 Miss ADA T. SULGER, Trenton, N. J.
 Miss MARY OLIVER, Allegheny, Pa.
 Miss MARGARET MANTON, New York City.

Mrs. LOUISE DOWNS QUIGLEY,
 Miss ETHEL FORESTM, London, England.
 Miss ANNIE B. T. WHITE, Bay Ridge, L. I.
 Miss MARY LILLY, Newark, N. J.
 Miss MARY CLARK, Matawan, N. J.

SECRETARY.

Miss MARY THOMAS, New York City.

TREASURER.

Miss ANNIE HILLYER, 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 fit 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 *cultivation of the mind*, study, thought, etc.

Yellow.—THE TOPAZ.—Emblematic of the *soul*—expresses the sun, the goodness of God, hope, joy, 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.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Temple.—Construction: Skeleton; Joints; Muscular, Circulatory, Arterial, Venous and Nervous Systems; Digestion and Respiration; Special Senses, Voice, etc. 2. Dress.—Suitable, Comfortable, Light in weight, Healthful, Beautiful. 3. Air.—Ventilation, etc. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Food, Drink, Bathing. 5. Sleep.—Rest. 6. Exercise.—Recreation. 7. Mental Culture. 8. Soul Culture. 9. Surroundings, Associations, etc. 10. Directions for the Care of the "Temple." |
|--|--|

For example, in defending the Delsarte system Stebbins calls upon her own authority, repeatedly and carefully established throughout her texts, to defend the entire system. In offering arguments that might serve to convince her readership, Stebbins often intertwines the professional and the fashionable, using both to ward off detractors of the system.³¹ 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” (Stebbins 1902, 460) (my emphasis). By highlighting the fashionable qualities of these schools, Stebbins seems to be caught between two worlds: the professional world toward which she and many of her fellow Delsarteans aspired, and the world of the fashionable that served as an acceptable ideal for middle class Victorian women and consumed the energies of most of them. Yet, Stebbins stood to gain much by placing herself between these two worlds. When one considers the progressive message she puts forth through her writings, it seems plausible that Stebbins was 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 were 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.

The Assertive Voice of the Professional Delsartean Woman

Ultimately, all of this maneuvering can be seen as part of a larger call by the most outspoken Delsarteans, 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” (Stebbins 1902, 406). In her effort to promote professionalism and high standards, not only does Stebbins argue that these Delsarteans 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 the free voice of the

Figure 4

Advertisement for Association.

Julia and Annie Thomas. Thomas Psycho-Physical Culture. 1892.

liberated individual. For women artists in the Victorian theater 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" (ibid. 452). By rejecting mere imitation, and seeking autonomy and power in artistic expression, Stebbins and other socially and professionally 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 judgment: "I am afraid that too much meditation on his favorite idol has created an intellectual hallucination in regard to Delsarte" (ibid. 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.³² 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 Baker and many theater historians, of Delsartian women flocking to Delsartism as unquestioning disciples of a god-like master. She approached Delsarte and his system as a colleague and fellow professional, and claimed that "Like all other human beings, Delsarte was liable to err, and often made serious mistakes" (393). However, she attempted to balance her own independence of thought and critical judgment with a professional respect for the namesake of the system she espoused.

In her quest for the status of a professional, no other phenomenon raised the ire of Stebbins as much as the supposed 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. (ibid. 395)

She ridiculed male authorities like Curry, labeling them “self appointed judges” who claimed 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 equated with a blind discipleship, arguing that for such unquestioning disciples the great truth “still remains concealed, like the alchemical enigma of the mystics, behind the abracadabra of its heirophant, Mackaye” (395–96). In unequivocal terms she dismissed such hero worship and mystery making and staked 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 thought of an unquestioning disciple disturbed Stebbins so deeply because he represented the model of authority that she knew would keep her students and all Delsartians in subjugation to patriarchal authority. The advances encouraged by a more scientific approach to movement training ideally worked against that authoritarian model. Her own stubbornness and refusal to allow others to dictate her choices about Delsartian philosophy and its application were frequently revealed in her advice to her students. She urged them to avoid unquestioning obedience to any authority: “Use your common sense.... A little natural gumption is necessary in following any set of rules” (ibid. 268). With these words and with many similar encouragements she called upon her fellow Delsartians, knowing that most of them were women, 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 Delsartean, 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 Delsartean writings.

Close examination of the most influential Delsartean instructional texts 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 Delsartean women swept up in the emotion of the tableaux 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 the Delsartean physical work aids the actor in her efforts to remain in control rather than encouraging 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. (Stebbins 1902, 439)

While their seemingly arbitrary “laws of grace” were interpreted idiosyncratically by individual instructors, 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, Georgen, Bishop, the Thomas sisters, and other Delsarte teachers blended a visible technique, an important marker of the professional, with encouragement of the student’s individual liberation through personal discovery of self and system. They frequently structured their exercises in drill format or began and ended their exercises in drill style with phrases like “Attention!” Through these means they sought to impart a discipline still sought in many modern actor training regimens designed to focus the actor upon the *form* of the exercise and thus free him through adherence to a structure.³³ Yet Stebbins was not likely to promote this style of drill in opposition to the flowering of natural ability. She considered “[t]he supremacy of genius as the necessity of labor,” and lamented that “there never was, perhaps, a period in which so many and so vain efforts have been made to replace it [genius] by study and toil” (Stebbins 1902, 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” (ibid. 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 artist’s work could flourish (ibid. 400–01).

Undoubtedly, the professionalism of second and third stage Delsartean women was compromised at best. It lacked clear standards; it was frequently a professionalism defined by little else than a defensive response to those who criticized Delsartism and the feminization of American Delsartism; and it relied on the self-styled labels of “difficult” and “fashionable” to serve as measures of professionalism. Nevertheless, while imperfect, the professionalism of these women represented a significant advance for the women and the theater training of the era. Many of these women found a way to overcome the most restrictive limitations of Victorian society, find a place for themselves as respected artists and teachers, and engage in a kind of entrepreneurship that belies the image of subservient women. By doing so they secured a quiet victory for progress in American theater and women’s rights at the dawn of the twentieth century.

Notes

1 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)

Similar lamentations have been offered by other historians studying this period, including Alan Trachtenberg in *The Incorporation of America Culture and Society in the Guilded Age* (1982) and Miles Orvell in *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880–1940*.

2 The artistic and social significance of this theater school movement has been most powerfully argued in Benjamin MacArthur's *Actors and American Culture: 1880–1920* (1984).

3 Some more recent introductory-level texts have taken a more balanced approach, including the most popular theater history text on the market today, Oscar Brockett's *History of the Theater*. Brockett concludes of the Delsarte System: "though it is now usually treated derisively, it has contributed to most subsequent attempts to formulate training programs for actors"(379).

4 The most popular and comprehensive American text on Delsarte-based training is Genevieve Stebbins' sixth edition of *The Delsarte System of Expression*, published in 1902. This work is a combination of lessons published in her first edition in 1885 and her subsequent investigations into theoretical, religious, historical, and esoteric subject matter. It includes a translation of Delsarte's address to the Philotechnic Society. This quotation is from that address.

5 By one count, in the last three decades of the 1800s Delsarteans were teaching and performing in at least thirty-eight states (Ruyter 1999, 58). A perusal of the advertisements in any issue of *Werner's Voice Magazine*, the primary periodical for Delsarteans during this period, illustrates the impressive scope of this studio activity.

6 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 Stanislavsky: American Professional Acting Schools and Acting Theory 1875–1925* (1993) and in several essays from *A History of Speech Education in America* (1954), edited by Karl R. Wallace. 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.

7 Stebbins is featured prominently in Ruyter's excellent study of American Delsartism, *The Cultivation of Body and Mind in Nineteenth-Century American Delsartism* (1999), the most rigorous examination of Delsartism in America to date.

8 In her article, written for a 1990 collection of essays entitled *Corporealities*, Ruyter offers a breakdown of the impressive range of Stebbins' Delsartean performances from 1880–1903. She is left, however, struggling with the contradictions and unfulfilled political and artistic promise of the American Delsartean 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 frustrated conclusion, which she caps with the phrase "To be continued..." (98).

9 The machine image frequently appears in scholars' assessments of Delsartism. For example, in his text *Players and Performances in the Victorian Theater*, 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 theater.

10 See also Leo Marx's landmark study *The Machine in the Garden* (New York: Oxford UP, 1964).

11 There are a few exceptions 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 theater 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 Delsarteans 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).

12 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 Delsarteans. When she acknowledges 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 Patsy Ann Clark 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 Delsartism 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)

- 13 For a thorough consideration of the complexity of Stebbins' vision of artistic statue posing and other performance forms, see Ruyter's treatments in “Corporealities” and *The Cultivation of Body and Mind*, Chapter 9.
- 14 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, Wilson labeled the adaptations of Americanizers of the system “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”(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.
- 15 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.
- 16 This passage can be found in the original 1885 edition of Stebbins' text and in subsequent editions up to the sixth edition of 1902. 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. If so, their writings would operate along the lines of Martha Banta's analysis of the power implicit in male attempts to “contain” the image of women (88) or Nina Auerbach's

argument that the subjugation of women is “a defensive response to this...self-transforming power surging beneath victimization” (34). Both Banta’s and Auerbach’s basic premise is that one needs to contain a thing only if it is a threat. Stebbins and other Delsartean women may have consciously chosen to write in the sentimental manner expected of women of the Gilded Age, at least in part, so that they would be seen as safely feminine rather than threateningly, “masculinely” independent women.

- 17 McTeague, who presents profiles of eleven of the most prominent schools of the era, discusses one school that does not follow the general trend. He writes that in the Stanhope-Wheatcroft school, 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)
- 18 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.
- 19 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 fears of misinformation, about Delsarte’s teachings could have been popularized in a very short time.
- 20 For an extensive discussion of the connection between the feminine and the sentimental in nineteenth-century America, see Ann Douglas’ *The Feminization of American Culture*.
- 21 Little has been written on Baker, although he does appear in most reference texts. For example, see Gerald Bordman, ed. *The Oxford Companion to American Theatre*. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.

- 22 Ironically, elsewhere Baker presents in earnest many of the conventions popular in statue posing, including a white makeup similar to that found in Eleanor Georgen's performance style. In an 1872 tableau entertainment entitled *Seven Ages of Life*, Baker takes his actors through seven tableaux 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 tableaux, 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 of the women he denigrates.
- 23 This quotation 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.
- 24 Again, however, Delsartians' sense of the professional is complicated. Stebbins' statement also suggests that religious and mystical knowledge were as much a measure of the professionalism of some advocates as was a thorough knowledge of anatomy.
- 25 Certainly there were incompetent and poorly trained teachers, but the frequency of historians' discussions of these teachers may be due more to the great attention they were given by the standard bearers of Delsartism, like Alger and Stebbins, in the late nineteenth-century than 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.
- 26 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 Delsartean woman incorporeal (see Banta's *Imaging American Women*). In his Delsarte-

based text *Gestures and Attitudes* (1892), Edward Warman devotes an entire chapter 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.”

- 27 For additional warnings about unqualified teachers, see Stebbins 1902, 410–11. One of the most fascinating aspects of Stebbins’ discussion of this subject can be found on pages 415–16. Here she intermixes male and female gender pronouns in her discussion of adherents to Delsartism. While this reflects the reality of her mixed-gender classes and the presence of both male and female teachers in American Delsartism, it also places men and women on equal footing in this emerging profession. In contrast, Georgen’s use of pronouns is also significant, for in her text which is explicitly designed for men and women, and which includes illustrations for both men and women, 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.
- 28 Georgen’s statement can also be seen as a defense against the anticipated critics of women Delsarteans 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 attempt to undermine her critics’ complaints.
- 29 See Banta’s *Imaging American Women* and Ann Douglas’s *The Feminization of American Culture* for extensive analyses of the relationship between motherhood as ideal and the changing image of Victorian women.
- 30 These included the Actor’s Fund of America (1882), the Actors’ Society of America (1896), and eventually Actor’s Equity Association (1913). See MacArthur’s *Actors and American Culture*, especially Chapter 9.
- 31 This intermingling of profession and fashion, and the utilitarian use of fashionable status for progressive aims has the potential to undermine social historians’ analyses of Victorian women’s images in fashion, particularly that of Martha Banta.
- 32 Curry, along with his teaching philosophy and his School of Expression in Massachusetts, is profiled in Chapter IV of McTeague’s *Before Stanislavsky*.
- 33 Wide ranging examples include Tadashi Suzuki’s work and Susana Bloch’s *Alba Emoting*. For study of Suzuki’s methods see *The Way of Acting* (1986) and Chapter 11 in Richard Brestoff’s *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods* (1995). For the role of drill exercises in *Alba Emoting*, see Susana Bloch, “Alba Emoting: A Psychophysiological Technique to Help Actors Create and Control Real Emotions,” *Theatre Topics* 3(1986): 121–38.

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