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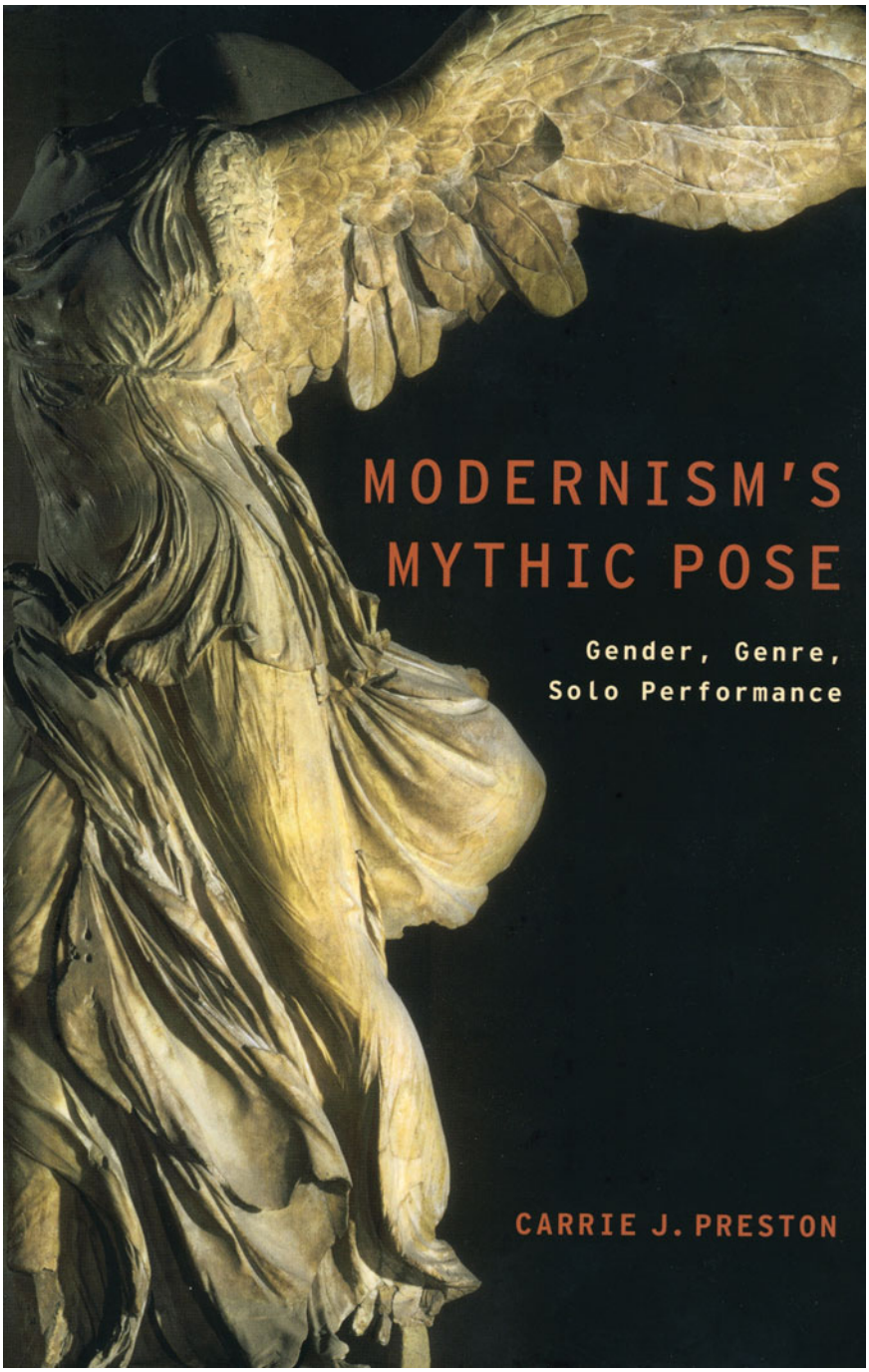

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The Ancient Dancer in the Modern World

Responses to Greek and Roman Dance

Edited by

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The Ancient Dancer in the Modern World: Responses to Greek and Roman Dance

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Modernism's Mythic Pose: Gender, Genre, Solo Performance

by Carrie J. Preston. 2011. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. 384 pp., 28 illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. $49.95 paper.
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Perhaps the best-known dancer from Greek antiquity is Hippocleides, who was a suitor for the hand of the daughter of Cleisthenes, the tyrant of Sicyon in the sixth century BCE. According to Herodotus, Hippocleides was "the most outstanding man in Athens for his wealth and good looks," and Cleisthenes preferred him for his son-in-law "because of his courage" (or "manly virtue," *andragathiê*) and because he was related to the Cypselidae of Corinth (*Histories* 6.127–8). On the day Cleisthenes was to make his decision, however, things took a wrong turn (*Histories* 6.129.2–4; trans. Waterfield 1998):

> After the meal, the suitors competed with one another at singing and at public speaking. As the drinking progressed, Hippocleides had a clear lead over the others, but then he told the pipe-player to strike up a tune, and when the musician did so he began to dance (*orchêsato*). Now, although Hippocleides liked his own dancing a lot, Cleisthenes was beginning to look on the whole business askance. After a while, Hippocleides stopped momentarily and asked for a table to be brought in. When the table arrived there, he first danced a Laconian dance on it, then some Attic figures, and finally stood on his head on the table and waggled his feet around. Hippocleides' uninhibited dancing of the first and second sets of figures had already put Cleisthenes off having him as a son-in-law, but he kept silent because he did not want to scold him. When he saw him making hand gestures with his legs (*echeironomêse*), however, he could no longer restrain himself. "Son of Tisander," he said, "you have danced away (*aporchêsao*) your marriage." The young man replied, "Hippocleides doesn't care! And that is how the proverb arose.

Hippocleides is not one of the ancient dancers in Fiona Macintosh's comprehensive and thoroughly researched edited volume. Nor is his headstand a mythic pose, the subject of Carrie Preston's book. But the anecdote raises two questions pertinent to this review: What is a dancer, and, more specifically, who or what is an ancient dancer? The first question is conceptual, and the second is historical. Must a dancer be a professional, or are amateurs or spur-of-the-moment practitioners like Hippocleides entitled to the name? What is the evidence for the dancer in antiquity, and how do we interpret that evidence? The case of Hippocleides also raises the question of dance as a political medium. Cleisthenes selects Hippocleides' Athenian rival Megacles for his son-in-law, and, as Herodotus goes on to tell us, this marriage produces the Cleisthenes who will establish the democracy in Athens and, in a later generation, the great Athenian statesman, Pericles. Hippocleides may have danced away his marriage, but in doing so he set in motion the downfall of Athenian tyranny. As the readers of *Dance Research Journal* will have guessed at this point, I approach these studies not as a dance historian—a field in which I claim no expertise—but as a classicist with a background in dance.

The title of Macintosh's volume, *The Ancient Dancer in the Modern World: Responses to Greek and Roman Dance*, draws our attention to the conceptual and historical variables referred to above. Macintosh, director of the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama and reader in the Reception of Greek and Roman Literature at the University of Oxford, is an established authority on the modern reception of ancient performance practices. With respect to dance—and this is also the case for other ancient performance practices, such as drama or epic poetry—we have to begin by asking what is being received or, as stated in the book's subtitle, what is being responded to. The truth is that we know very little about ancient dance, and most of what we do know is anecdotal, like the story of the unfortunate Hippocleides, or based on the notoriously inconclusive evidence of vase painting. Literary evidence, especially from Old Comedy, is useful, but far from objective. As a generic category, moreover, ancient dance is multiform: the tragic chorus, military routines (the Pyrrhic "dance"), and Hippocleides' headstand can all be subjects of the Greek verb *orcheomai*, "to dance" (cf. Golder 1996). Among these forms, ancient pantomime—defined as expressive gesture unaccompanied by words—has received a lot of attention recently. But under what definition is pantomime a form of dance?

If there is an ancient dancer in the modern world, that dancer is clearly a figure of the modern imagination, fueled principally by Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* and more generally by early twentieth-century scholarship on ancient myth and ritual. In general, the terms "modern" and "modernism" in both books are situated within this cultural milieu in which they seem to oscillate between aesthetic and historical criteria; this is especially true of Preston's book. Nietzsche's Apollonian/Dionysian binary is a recurring point of reference and, while not always stated outright, the source for several other binaries that operate in both books: classical ballet/modern dance; "pure form"/freedom of movement; abstraction/expressivism; male/female; moral/morally suspect; individuation/collective experience; mimetic/authentic; training/innate talent. I list these because their recurrence results in a certain predictability and repetitiveness in both volumes. Given the multidisciplinary nature of Macintosh's book this may be unavoidable; contributors include dance scholars, practitioners (directors, dancers, choreographers), classicists, dance critics, English literature scholars, and a classical archaeologist. But this multidisciplinary framework also attests to the force of these binaries within dance history (and cultural history more generally), often with the aim of championing modern dance over classical ballet, which is defined as male, abstract, formally rigid, and lacking in expressiveness. These claims, when uncritically recited, prohibit a more nuanced account of the philosophical, technical, and historical distinctiveness of modern dance. They also invite an interrogation of the ideological utility of ancient dance in an invented genealogy of modern dance.

In some cases, ancient dance grants intellectual and aesthetic respectability to modern forms. In others, it provides a precedent both for defending modern dance and for condemning it. But as Macintosh's volume makes clear, ancient dance or the ancient dancer is less a source of modern choreographic inspiration than ancient myth or "ritual," via the work of Jane Ellen Harrison and the Cambridge School. This is especially true for Isadora Duncan, who plays an important role in both books. That myth overshadows dance points to a conundrum that has long plagued scholars in theater studies or performance studies more generally, namely, the relationship between the text and the event. Myths are obviously the products of a long and complicated textual tradition. They become part of a visual or movement culture in choral lyric and then in the choruses of Attic drama. But beyond some deictic references, these texts provide little evidence for how the performers actually moved; the paucity of evidence for musical notation in antiquity can also be noted here. They do, however, constitute different mimetic regimes: in choral lyric, performers seem to dance as themselves (as in Alcman's *Partheneia*, for example); in drama they dance as (masked) others. This alternation between actual and mythological personae—which includes the temporal dimensions of present and past—is, it seems to me, decisive for the history of modern dance in general and for the topic of Macintosh's volume in particular. It goes to the heart of the expressive quality of dance as both a mimetic and non-mimetic mode or, more precisely, to the

tension between these modes as a defining feature of dance. In short, the relationship between the (ancient) text and the (modern) event poses a particular theoretical problem for dance historians, one that is analogous to "the stage and the page" but that requires its own analytical tools. A better understanding of this relationship will help to explain, for example, how ancient dance is constituted in its reception, that is to say, in the creative decisions of its modern practitioners. This is the particular strength of Macintosh's volume.

Both books also testify to the incompleteness and elusiveness of anything like an archive of modern dance. Some early twentieth-century dances are preserved on film, but most are not. Dance scholars rely on contemporary reviews of the performances, still photographs, interviews with the choreographers, and, when available, eyewitness reports. But these various forms of evidence are often used interchangeably and sometimes uncritically, as if their creation and transmission were unmotivated. The archive of dance has obviously become more extensive with the advent of readily available visual technologies. What strikes me as relevant, however, is the extent to which modern dance up to the present moment shares this archival dilemma with ancient dance, even in the age of YouTube. The contemporary evidence of bodies moving in space is clearly superior to that provided by the static figures painted on ancient vases. But the acknowledged limits of the latter may provide a useful cautionary tale for the perceived superiority of the former. Once again, the challenge is to understand why and how dance as a historical phenomenon resists preservation and interpretation. The reconstruction of earlier dances by later practitioners, or what has been called the "reenactive turn" in dance studies, is both a symptom of and a response to this resistance. In constituting an archive, such reconstructions demonstrate the competition between preservation and decay that Alois Riegl (1928) famously assigned to artifacts and monuments; they also extend and complicate the notion of repertoire.

The Ancient Dancer in the Modern World is divided into five parts, which are arranged according to loose thematic categories. The book overall is an impressive account of the ways in which antiquity has influenced the world of dance in the west, beginning in the sixteenth century. The majority of the essays are of high quality, and together they constitute a broad and impressive range of scholarly expertise and historical and biographical documentation supported by excellent archival research. The book is nicely produced, with excellent plates and useful cross-referencing among the essays. There are very few errors: Some references are missing in the footnotes; Richmond Lattimore is called Richard Lattimore (p. 265) and is not listed in the general bibliography; no citation is provided for the *New York Times* article referred to on p. 343. These are trivial. If Lillian B. Lawler's 1964 book, *The Dance in Ancient Greece*, was, until recently, the authority on ancient dance in English language scholarship (Smith 89–91), Macintosh and her contributors have helped to inaugurate and define the post-Lawler era.

In Part I, "Dance and the Ancient Sources," Ismene Lada-Richards and Frederick Naerebout argue for the importance of ancient pantomime or nonverbal storytelling for the history of dance in England and France in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They demonstrate how the ancient pantomime provided dance practitioners with a point of origin and a claim to legitimacy. But there is a certain circularity in Lada-Richards's argument that the "somatic techniques" in the eighteenth century stem from "the ancient dancer's art" (29–30). It seems more accurate to say that the art of the modern and the ancient dancer are mutually productive. And as Lada-Richards concludes, "The real yardstick is not so much the pantomime of the ancients per se, but pantomime as refashioned *in accordance with prevalent aesthetic assumptions*" (34; emphasis in the original). Naerebout's essay looks at the "pantomimic craze" of the eighteenth century through the lens of the nineteenth century obsession with "the real" and "the authentic." This obsession is furthered in the invention of photography, the chronophotography of Muybridge, and, eventually, in cinema. The question of authenticity runs through the essays in Part I. Ann Cooper Albright investigates Loïe Fuller's claim to a "natural" style of dancing as distinct from Duncan's "cultivated art" (73), with the consequence that Greek dance is simultaneously and paradoxically a source for imitation (with

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"accuracy" as its aim) and for natural expression (with "authenticity" as its aim). But sometimes the appeal to authenticity can be insufficiently skeptical. This is the case with Kathleen Riley's tour-de-force essay on Fred Astaire, whose hand gestures, she argues, conform to Lucian's description of *cheironomia* or "talking hands" (104; note that this is what Hippocleides did with his legs!). We learn many interesting things about Astaire's career in this essay, but it is unclear how that career, including the larger social and institutional context in which Astaire was working, is enlightened by comparison with ancient practices.

In Part II, "Dance and Decadence," the authors focus on the history of anti-dance prejudice and, in particular, its gender-specific variables. This is the strongest set of essays in the book. In her excellent piece on Salome's famous dance, Ruth Webb demonstrates its significance as a source of ancient and modern cultural tensions within the context of early Christianity, following out the implications of John Chrysostom's dictum, "Where there is dance, there is the devil" (132). As Webb demonstrates, Salome's dance is a form of female transgression that provides a moral and racially inflected antithesis to the emergence of "Greek" dance in Britain in the early twentieth century. In doing so, she also provides a model for how historical investigation and theoretical insight can inform each other. Edith Hall looks for the exemplary male dancer in the ancient sources. According to Hall, "To dance was and still is to run the risk of relinquishing autonomous control over the meaning created by one's own body, and thus to relinquish all that is signified by masculinity in culture" (145). Here I am reminded both of Hippocleides and of Maud Gleason's 1995 book, *Making Men*, in which her account of the physical training required of the orator's art may constitute an antidote to dance in Hall's terms. But if an unambiguous masculine identity is the consequence of specific bodily practices, it is not entirely clear why the dancer risks losing control. More convincingly, Hall shows how effeminacy and moral degeneracy are negative attributes of male dancers, beginning with Homer. Hall's conclusion that "Unease with male dancing is built into the foundations of western discourse" (147) can, as Webb shows, also be said of female dancing. Macintosh's own piece documents the careers of "dancing maenads" in Britain between the world wars. Noting the anti-Semitic backlash for Maud Allan's role in Wilde's *Salome*, Macintosh concludes that she was punished because she "danced like a maenad" (197). This seems somewhat overstated, but it lays the groundwork for an account of how Greek dance becomes tamed and democratized as a form of physical exercise and collective movement in this period. Thoroughly researched and carefully argued, the force of Macintosh's essay is her illumination of the dark underside of this development; in the service of promoting a "healthy Ango-Saxon culture," Greek dance is implicated in eugenics, racism, and British nationalism (206–7). The taming of the radical maenad, in other words, is linked to the century's ugliest forms of social and political conformity.

In Part III, "Dance and Myth," Barbara Ravelhofer offers a fascinating account of Thomas Campion's *Lord Hay's Masque* (written in 1607), a work whose unique archive of visual and textual materials allows a detailed analysis of the event. Ravelhofer notes that allusions to Greece and Rome often formed the basis for the costumes, sets, music, poetry, and dance of English masques between 1604 and 1640. What is unclear, as she states, is "whether the spectators enjoying Hay's masque would have identified someone dressed up as, say, Socrates or Clytemnestra, as being Greek" (217). Nonetheless, glimpses of antiquity—however blurred—are the source of social and political capital "for a Scottish courtier anxious about bloodlines and pedigree" (223). Pantelis Michelakis analyzes Eva Palmer's *Prometheus Bound*, produced in Delphi in 1927 and again in 1930, and Ted Shawn's 1929 solo performance of a work by the same name. Of particular importance are Michelakis's comments on the "documentary authenticity" of the filmed versions of these dances that, as he points out, are no less mediated than they are in a live performance. In the case of Shawn, authenticity also pertains to his hypermasculine performance identity. In contrast, Palmer's schoolgirl chorus of Oceanids exemplifies the "progressive aesthetics and politics" associated with collective choreography by women (235). Nadine Meisner looks at Pina Bausch's productions of Gluck's *Iphigenie auf Tauris* (1974) and *Orpheus und Eurydike* (1975). In the context

of somewhat essentialist claims about the democratic character of modern dance and the creative potential of woman choreographers, Meisner argues that in these Greek-inspired works, Bausch exhibits an "equalizing approach" and a form of "naturalism" that are indebted to Euripides (283). It may be that Euripides's plays championed human motivation over divine determinism, but then we have to ask about his common use of the *deus ex machina*, including Athena at the end of *Iphigenia Among the Taurians.* My point here, however, is less about Euripides than about Greek tragedy as the source for "naturalism." When Meisner concludes that Bausch's works "make us realize that each of us is wonderfully unique and fascinating, as extraordinary in fact as the heroes and heroines of Greek myth" (294), we are left wondering if such a realization is natural.

Part IV, "Ancient Dance in the Modern Mind," moves us into more recent territory. Susan Jones discusses the revision history of Balanchine's *Apollo*. Much of this territory has been covered in previous chapters. But Jones' account of the erosion of narrative in the 1979 version of the dance—which she calls "more Apolline" (327)—constitutes a singular example of how the Nietzschean binary contributes to the contested relationship between form and content in the history of modern dance. Vanda Zajko explores the intersections of myth and modernism in Graham's *Night Journey*. In the context of the advent of psychoanalysis, Zajko asserts that Graham's use of myth "allowed both the dancer and the observer to connect with atavistic instincts of profound significance beyond the merely individual" (338). She further claims that Graham wanted "to escape the natural associations of women's bodies" (342). These conclusions are suggestive for understanding Graham's choreographic choices. But they also exemplify some recurring aporias in the volume. Is modern dance the work of the individual or the collective? Is it "natural" or ritualistic? Is it abstract or mimetic? Is it new or old? Apollonian or Dionysian? Zajko suggests that, for Graham, it was all these things. Arabella Stanger's discussion of William Forsythe's *Eidos:Telos* and Michael Clark's *O* and *Mmm*, all originally produced in the 1990s, poses similar questions. These works pay homage to the legacy of Balanchine's "Apolline classicism" and excite what the author calls "the Dionysian stirrings of human experience" (350–3). The trajectory that Stanger charts from Apollonian (classical ballet) to Dionysian (ballet on drugs, in clubs, off balance) usefully situates these choreographers within the context of a postmodern fragmentation equated with the *sparagmos* of Dionysian ritual. But here again, Nietzsche's terms become generic descriptors that can limit interpretation: if the *arabesque penché* of classical ballet is phallic, as Stanger says, can it not also be an expression of the excess she attributes to the Dionysian (354)?

The aporias mentioned above should be kept in mind as we turn to Carrie Preston's *Modernism's Mythic Pose: Gender, Genre, Solo Performance*. Preston traces the history of modern performance practices through what she calls an "antimodern classicism." A key figure is François Delsarte (1811–1871), whose system of poses and gestures had an international following into the early twentieth century. This is not a book about dance per se but about how modernism teeters on the Delsartean relationship between outer (bodily) display and the expression of inner (emotional) dispositions in a variety of performance genres.

In Chapter 1, Preston discusses Emma Lyon Hamilton, whose statue posing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries has, according to Preston, received little scholarly attention. Hamilton's repertoire of poses, which included figures from classical and Christian myth, adopted a typological symbolism that is also expressed in the dramatic monologues of English poets such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti (53). Three related points are pertinent to the history of movement and, if less directly, to the history of dance. First, Preston notes that posing required the performer to enact fluid transitions from one pose to another; these transitional movements attest to the mutability of gender identity and social status. Second, the pose was successful only to the extent that it was able to exteriorize an interior emotional state; the measure of success, in other words, is the natural correspondence between the body and what Delsarte called the soul. And third, posing required an audience of elites who could recognize, for example, the figures of

Medea or Niobe; here recognition includes not only the figures themselves but also knowledge of the myths that stand behind them. In short, statue posing introduces the complex interplay between authenticity, naturalism, and mimesis that characterizes the history of modern dance.

In Chapter 2, "Posing Modernism," Preston provides an overview of Delsarte's system and its various adherents in dance and early film. She calls Delsartism "the first international performance theory of modernism," but it is one that constitutes "an antimodern rejection of the machine age" (59). Although Preston does not put it this way, her argument seems to be that modernism is constituted in a dialectic between the modern and the antimodern. But what Preston means by "antimodern" is not always clear. Beyond the obvious fact of chronology, for example, in what sense is the invocation of ancient myth antimodern rather than, say, premodernist? The justification for this slippage may be Preston's often-repeated claim that other scholars of modernism have overlooked the influence of Delsartism (61). It explains this disregard, in other words, as a failure to recognize modernism's antimodern sources. Preston's most original argument in this chapter has to do with the film montage of Lev Kuleshov, whose "vision of the performing human body builds on Delsarte's idea that every body part, every joint, has an expressive and psychological function" (92). Kuleshov's experiments included "splicing together images of different women's body parts to 'depict a girl who did not exist in nature'" (95). Although Preston does not mention it, this experiment takes us back to the story of the ancient Greek painter Zeuxis who, according to Cicero, selected the best features from five virgins to make his painting of Helen of Troy (*de Inventione* 2.1–2). Here, in other words, Delsartism is ironically implicated in a history of aesthetics in which the anatomized body signifies the insufficiency of nature rather than its fullness. Here perhaps we can appreciate how the modern (film montage) remakes what Preston calls —perhaps too uncritically—the antimodern.

Chapter 3, "Positioning Genre," focuses on what Preston calls "cultures of recitation" in Britain and the United States in the early twentieth century. As a subject in schools of elocution, the dramatic monologue taught students to express meaning "naturally" (108) and, by extension, brought modernist poetics under the Delsartean orbit. If there is an analogy to be made with modern dance, it has to do with the expressive quality of the voice; is this quality a product of nature or culture, the individual or the collective, an inner reality or an external technique? Perhaps what Preston calls "antimodern classicism" is a name for this indecision. A similar indecision marks the career of H.D., the subject of Chapter 5. Preston finds an "optimistic antimodern classicism" in H.D.'s approach to film, particularly in the tension film produces between individual and group identification. Of particular interest is Preston's account of H.D.'s resistance to sound as a potential source of nationalist propaganda (230). Following WWI, the historical context of this critique is decisive. Together with H.D.'s interest in montage, it also looks back to statue posing as a kind of protocinematic genre. Silent film, in other words, paradoxically enacts the "antimodern" desire for the Delsartean unity of body and soul in the transition from one visual moment to the next. Combined with the importance of ancient ritual and myth in H.D.'s poetry and film writing, this paradox is also built into the history of modern dance.

For the purpose of this review, the most relevant chapter in Preston's book is Chapter 4, "The Motor in the Soul." Preston begins from the premise that Delsarte's influence on Isadora Duncan is "not fully recognized" (152), and indeed Delsarte is not mentioned in Macintosh's volume. [I am assuming that Macintosh's book was not available before Preston published her book.] Preston credits Duncan—who called herself a professor of Delsarte very early in her career—with transforming Delsartean statue posing into a hybrid performance form adapted to the high art stage. She argues that Duncan's Delsartean training—which she denied later in her career—lies behind her claims to the "full movement" of dance, her famous metaphor of "the motor of the soul," her critique of ballet as "not worthy of the soul" (156), and her adoption of a romantic individualism. Preston also argues that Duncan's Delsartism helps to explain the

contradictory qualities that define her dance, namely, "choreographed spontaneity and a deliberate display of the labor to move" (176–7).

This contradiction is a key variable in the history of modern dance, including its engagement with ancient myth and ritual and, if more indirectly, with the ancient dancer. Codified in Nietzsche's Apolline/Dionysian binary, dance becomes a test case for the "content of the form" expressed in the moving body and silent soul of the dancer. From Macintosh's ancient dancer to Preston's anti-modern classicism and from the pantomime to the mythic pose, the question remains whether, as a source of choreographic inspiration, antiquity had not already—in effect—become modern. Both books, in other words, invite a new and skeptical look at the aesthetic, philosophical, and political categories that constitute the history of modern dance, beginning with the history of resistance epitomized in the proverb "Hippocleides doesn't care!"

Both books are nicely produced, meticulously researched and thoroughly documented. But Preston's citation style—in which short titles are given without the author's name—is frustrating.

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