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ABSTRACT

JAMES STEELE MACKAYE'S ADAPTATION OF THE DELSARTE SYSTEM OF EXPRESSION FOR THE SPECTATORIUM

by Frederick A. DeSantis

In any study of Francois Delsarte's theories and techniques, the American theatrical genius, James Steele MacKaye, always assumes an important function. To thoroughly know the contributions of one is to know much about the other, as their professional lives became inextricably entwined from the day of their first meeting. Actually, while examining the available data, it sometimes becomes difficult to decipher exactly which elements of the system of expression should be credited to Delsarte and which to MacKaye. Both were uniquely gifted artists who, together, did much to further a deeper understanding of the art of dramatic expression.

An historical treatise of this kind will immediately raise many questions in the mind of the reader: First of all, what bearing does this have on the theatre of today?; secondly, aren't the contributions of these artists a trifle archaic in light of more recent developments in this area?; and thirdly, what is the precise contribution that this study makes? In answer to these questions let it be stated that, though many of the achievements of past years now seem a bit foolish, they were necessary to, and an



outgrowth of, the theatrical developments and demands of a particular era. Without the genius of men like Delsarte and MacKaye it is very possible that theatre, as we know it today, would not have arrived anywhere near the heights that it has attained.

The contribution of this study will have to be limited in its scope, and focused upon the continuing influences of Delsarte in Steele MacKaye's artistic life, culminating with his Spectatorium. Each of the respective works, consulted for this thesis treats of Delsarte's influence upon MacKaye as one which was restricted to a rather early and brief portion of his career, as one which became less and less important to MacKaye as his interests shifted away from acting into the areas of producing, teaching, writing, and scenic conventions.

Joseph Batchellar's study is concerned with MacKaye's contributions as an inventor, producer, manager, with few references to the Delsarte-MacKaye relationship.

Rayda Wallace Dillpart's study treats of the many pupils who trained with Delsarte. MacKaye is mentioned; however, few details are given. Virginia Morris's study is concerned with Steele MacKaye's Delsartian lectures, with a mention of the influences of Delsarte evident in MacKaye's later theatrical activities.

George Albert Neely's study is concerned with the Delsarte system, itself. As such, MacKaye is not included.

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Claude Shauer's study is concerned with the Delsarte system as revealed through Steele MacKaye's notes. MacKaye's contributions and adaptations are not considered.

Percy MacKaye, in his work, Epoch, denotes much material to the Delsarte-MacKaye relationship of the early years. Thereafter, references are made only for biographical purposes. When references are made concerning MacKaye's acting and lecturing, Delsarte is mentioned--never in connection with his theatrical inventions.

Other books and articles follow a similar pattern. Sometimes the Delsarte system, itself, is treated. Certain aspects of the Delsarte-MacKaye relationship are clarified. None of the existing reference material--with the exception, perhaps, of A. Nicholas Vardac's Stage to Screen, point out the importance of Delsarte influences as they were revised and adapted to fit the needs of MacKaye, along with the theatrical needs of the time.

Though it may seem strange and somewhat improbable that a system of dramatic expression would have a direct bearing upon theatrical presentations and inventions, it will be the primary purpose of this study to prove that it was so. To treat of early Delsartian influences in MacKaye's career is to trace them to their logical conclusion, and this conclusion is to be found in his theatrical inventions and productions, which were a direct

outgrowth of these influences. MacKaye's Spectatorium utilized all of his inventive genius and theatrical contributions.

The late-nineteenth century pictorial theatre of realism and romance leading up to the first silent movies culminated with spectacular stage presentations, ingenious inventions and special effects made possible through the unique and varied talents of MacKaye; what can be called the photographic ideal in the theatre of the time can be traced directly to MacKaye and the Delsartian principles which he evolved into a science and art of his own.

Before attempting to reveal the Delsartian principles as they developed in Steele MacKaye's contributions to the pictorial theatre of realism and romance, some necessary background will be helpful. For purposes of clarification this study will be divided into three chapters, though the continuity in and between them should be perfectly evident: Chapter I.--A biographical sketch of Francois Delsarte and James Steele MacKaye will summarize their lives, and highlight the events pertinent to this study. The biography of Delsarte will include his basic theories on the 'science of art,' and the practical application of these theories to the art of expression. All sources which in any way clarify these theories will be cited, along with this writer's viewpoints.

The biography of James Steele MacKaye will briefly summarize his youth, with particular emphasis on his

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relationship with Delsarte. Then, an account of MacKaye's lecture-tours, schools, writing, acting, managing, and inventing will be given.

Chapter II.--This part of the study will be directly concerned with specifics of the lecture material of James Steele MacKaye and the manner in which the lectures were presented. In addition, various critics and audience members of distinction will be cited, so as to reveal the impression MacKaye made at that time. A summarizing and synthesizing paragraph including this writer's views and interpretations is added.

Chapter III.--The development of Delsartian ideals as they were adapted by Steele MacKaye for their use in the pictorial theatre of realism and romance, the triumvirate of which included Steele MacKaye, David Belasco, and Henry Irving. This romantic-realistic theatre served as the culminating phase of the theatrical trend which directly led to the silent motion picture.

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JAMES STEELE MACKAYE'S ADAPTATION OF THE
DELSARTE SYSTEM OF EXPRESSION
FOR THE SPECTATORIUM

By

Frederick A. DeSantis

A THESIS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION--DELSARTE AND MACKAYE

Before it is possible to elaborate upon the work that these two geniuses of the theatre accomplished together, it will be necessary to give some considerable background information as to who, exactly, they both were in their respective professions and countries, what they had accomplished, and how they were regarded at the time of their meeting in Paris, France in the autumn of 1869. To clarify the material with which this thesis is primarily concerned, it will be most helpful to begin with a concise biographical study of the two men, along with a general resume of the basic Delsartian theories as they were first developed.

Delsarte's Early Years

Francois Delsarte was born at Solesmes, Department of the North, France, in 1811. His father was a physician, and his mother a woman of rare abilities, who taught herself to speak and write several languages.¹ His childhood, as was his whole lifetime, was blighted with privation, tragedy, and poverty. Shortly after his parental home was razed to

¹F. A. Durivage, "Delsarte," The Atlantic Monthly XXVII (May, 1871), 614.

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the ground by White Terrorists, domestic troubles forced his mother, along with her two little sons, to flee to Paris. There, Francois left his mother and brother to seek what employment he could find, only to find his mother dead of starvation upon his return, and a few days later his brother from the same causes.²

Three articles by F. A. Durivage--an American journalist greatly responsible for the introduction of Delsarte in America--, Claude Shaver, and Margaret Fleming, respectively, concur that the gifted child (Delsarte) developed a great love for music at an early age and was one day discovered drawing figures in the dust. The man who discovered him turned out to be the celebrated professor of music, Bambini, and the figures in the dust were a personal system of music notation developed by little Francois to remember the various tunes he heard during his vagrant wanderings.³ "In the dust of Paris were first written the elements of a system destined to regenerate art. Bambini taught his protege all he knew, but the pupil soon surpassed the master and became his instructor in turn; for if the one had talent, the other possessed genius."⁴

²Ibid., pp. 614-616.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

After the death of Bambini, the boy, at fourteen years of age, managed to get himself admitted into the Conservatory of Paris, where he studied both music and elocution. Here, though he worked diligently, he met with nothing but harsh treatment and discouragement. His teachers were more like dictators forcing conventionalism and routine upon him and frowning upon any attempt at emancipation on his part. "Genius was a heresy for which they had no mercy."⁵

It was at this time that he undertook and developed a style of artistry uniquely his own. "Thrown upon his own resources, he soon developed, by careful observation of nature and a constant study of cause and effect, a system and a style radically differing from those of the professors and their servile imitators."⁶ It becomes evident, here, that the art of elocution was included in his courses at the Conservatory, and the contradictory methods utilized by Delsarte's teachers were disturbing to his artistic integrity. He was interested in a style of artistic expression which encompassed the whole artist, body and soul.

The teachings of the different masters of elocution diverged so widely, and seemed so meaningless to him, that he began independent studies of movement and

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

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gesture, in the effort to discover the ruling laws. He went from the streets, and the drawing-rooms of his friends, to the dissecting rooms, and found that in movement, whether in the greatest lady or the humblest peasant, was expressed the character. He found in the body a rhythm with the soul. He observed that when the soul was well poised, the body was well poised. He discovered that we each have within us an intuitive knowledge of this fact, and unconsciously use it in our judgment of our fellow creatures.⁷

The climatic achievement of his studies was his commission as Comedien du Roi at the Opera Comique in Paris. This honor resulted partly from the promptings of his own genius, together with encouraging praises from the great Malibran (Marie) the queen of song, and Alfred Nourrit, both of whom heard him in private recital. The commission was won after being literally thrown upon the stage in a most shabby condition, being warned to sing beautifully or never show his face at the stage-door again.⁸

Francois Delsarte retained his position as singer on the lyric stage until 1834, when the failure of his voice, due to strain imposed upon it while at the Conservatory, compelled him to direct his efforts to a scientific study of both music and the dramatic arts.⁹

He now applied himself to the task of establishing a scientific basis for lyric and dramatic art, and after years of patient labor perfected a system on

⁷Margaret Fleming, "The Delsarte Theory," Munsey's Magazine, IX (April, 1893), 32.

⁸Durivage, op. cit., pp. 616-617.

⁹Ibid., pp. 617-618.

which probably his fame will ultimately rest. His Cours [Delsarte titled his course, "Cours D'Esthétique Appliquée"] for instruction in the principles of art was first opened in 1839. From the outset he was appreciated by the highly cultivated few, nor was it long before the circle extended and the new master won a European reputation.¹⁰

Of the gifted and famous personages who worked under the master's tutelage were the names of

. . . Malibran (who) attended his early course of lectures. I have already mentioned Rachel and Macready as his pupils. I now recall the names of Sontag, of the gifted Madeleine Brohan, of Carvalho, Barbot, Pasca (who owed everything to Delsarte), and Pajol. He [Delsarte] was the instructor in pulpit oratory of Pere Lacordaire, Pere Hyacinthe, and the present abbe of Notre Dame.¹¹

Before analyzing Delsarte's study of gesture and its agents it will be helpful to cite some of his basic views on art, as these views were the basis of his later development of the 'science of art.' Delsarte, in an address to the Philotechnic Society of Paris--translated from an unpublished manuscript--presented the topic of his lecture in the following manner:

The question is of art; of art disengaged from its applications; of art in itself; of art of which the beginning and the end are in God, and of which the genesis upon this earth remounts to the cradle of creation.¹²

¹⁰Ibid., p. 618.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Genevieve Stebbins, Delsarte System of Expression (New York: Edgar S. Werner Publishing and Supply Co., 1902), p. 22.

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And from the above premise he proceeds further with his analysis of what constitutes art.

Delsarte's System of Expression

Art is divine in its principles, divine in its essence, divine in its action, divine in its end. And what are, in effect, the essential principles of art? Are they not, taking them together, the Good, the True, and the Beautiful? And their action, and their end,---are they other than a tendency incessantly directed toward the realization of these three terms? Now the Good, the True, and the Beautiful can be found only in God. Thus, art is divine in the sense that it emanates from His divine perfections; in the sense that it constitutes for us even the idea of those perfections; and, above all, in the sense that it tends to realize in us, about us, and beyond us this triple perfection that it draws from God.¹³

From the above definition can readily be seen the religious fervor underlying Delsarte's beliefs. This definition should be continually borne in mind as his 'science' of artistic expression comes under closer scrutiny. This scientific system, partially a result of the frustrations of the Conservatory, did not arise because he considered there were no existing artists and specialists of great individual merit. He merely doubted that they had between them a determined scientific basis, systematic entity and community of belief.

Where is their code and, consequently, the possibility of exercising the smallest jurisdiction? Their official reunion, has it ever produced anything which justified the title of school with which they ornament themselves? What is a school that has no

¹³Ibid, p. 30.



settled principles, no established doctrine, no definite instruction? What kind of a school is it whose contradictory methods incessantly let art fall into the domain of fashion, thus subordinating its noble powers to the vagabondage of the senses as well as to the silly variations of caprice and fantasy? Finally, what is a school which, owing to the complete absence of determined rules, surrenders, without defense, to the interior tyranny of an unbridled imagination and to the still more humiliating tyranny of prejudices and tastes, sometimes very abject, of a public to which she submits as a slave when she ought to command as a queen?¹⁴

The above statements seem to indicate that Delsarte believed in a basic set of unvarying laws underlying artistic expression, and that, despite individual talents, these laws would remain constant. A definition of art, then, must be preceded by a definition of science:

"Science is the possession of a criterion of examination against which no fact protests. Art is the generalization and application of it."¹⁵

Claude Shaver startlingly reveals--from notes in Delsarte's own handwriting--that the master was not a speech teacher in any real sense of the word, but was, primarily, a teacher of instrumental and vocal music and an opera coach. In later years, he seems to have coached some legitimate acting and to have offered instruction to clergymen. Through recitation was used, it was merely a method of teaching acting.¹⁶ It would appear, then, since

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 39-40.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁶Claude L. Shaver, "Steele MacKaye and the Delsarte System," A History of Speech Education in America, Karl Wallace (ed.) (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1954), 204.

Delsarte's system was not exactly a system of teaching either speech or music, that it was some kind of pseudo-philosophy, claiming to be a science, which organized all arts and sciences according to a plan which was based, in essence, on orthodox Catholic doctrine. "In a period in which science was pushing forward rapidly, Delsarte's "System" was essentially a throwback to a conservative orthodox view under the guise of being a science."¹⁷

The science on which the system is founded, however, is purely speculative.

The criterion that Delsarte speaks of in his definition of science was found in the Holy Trinity. And so, proceeding from his basic premise, he approaches art from a triple point of view: ontological, moral, and organic.

Art is . . . possession and free direction of the agents . . . by which are revealed life, mind and soul . . . the triple object of which is to move, convince and to persuade. Art is not an imitation of nature. It elevates in idealizing her Art, finally, is the tendency of the fallen soul toward its primitive purity, or its final splendor; in one word, it is the search for the eternal type Man, made in the image of God, manifestly carries in his inner being as in his body, the august imprint of his triple causality Man considered from the point of view of art, presents three orders of essential functions, each one depending upon a proper and determined organic apparatus. These apparatuses engender three orders of corresponding products. Thus, there results in the phenomena three states, three species of acts, three languages, each one

¹⁷Ibid.

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of which should be studied in itself and in its relations of association, of succession and of hierarchy. These three orders of functions, of apparatuses and of languages constitute the natural division of the phenomena of the human personality and of its triple causality.¹⁸

It would appear that M. Delsarte's 'science' consisted of directing the light of his criterion of examination on all things, and with regards to this idea of the trinity, to discover their interior organization, and to explain the *raison d'être* of their external products. On this examination and on the science thus established, he bases all his arts. "All things, according to the system, show a trinitary organization. For example, any object has height width, thickness; time consists of past time, present time, future time, etc."¹⁹

The Practical Application of Delsarte's System

It will now be the purpose of this study to deal with the actual philosophy of Delsarte's system as it directly applies to the outward manifestations of creativity in the actor's means of artistic expression, and to clarify precisely which conditions inherent in the human being are responsible for these manifestations. Of the conscientiousness with which Delsarte worked, it may be mentioned that he devoted five years to the study

¹⁸Stebbins, op. cit., pp. 64-67.

¹⁹Shaver, loc. cit.

of anatomy and physiology, to obtain a perfect knowledge of all muscles, their uses and capabilities,--a knowledge which he utilized with remarkable success.²⁰

That the soul, in its covering of flesh called the body, moves in obedience to universal law was the great discovery of Delsarte. He stated that the three conditions imposed by space, time, and motion--the three great elements by which its activities are inevitably environed--restrict the soul's activities. The soul must express itself in space, through time, and by motion, and requires time in which to manifest itself. Finally, the force by which this motion is produced is supplied by the soul, or psychic principle, and is of three different kinds, each corresponding to the three states of the being which it translates in expression.²¹

To the child who has been educated in the beginning by the kindergarten system of Froebel, this will be no fresh theory. Froebel taught that all outward form is but the reflection of a spiritual or mental fact, and that there are fundamental rules by which the inner life can be correctly judged by the outer. But Delsarte has taken the main stem of Froebel's philosophy, and so elaborated and embroidered, and worked the theory into such an exquisite detail, that it is truly his own.²²

²⁰Durivage, loc. cit.

²¹Anna Morgan, An Hour with Delsarte (Boston: Lee E. Shepard Publishers. New York: Charles T. Dillingham, 1890), p. 25.

²²Fleming, loc. cit.



Thus, when the force of the soul causes outward motion--from the body--it is called Vital, as it proceeds from our physical nature; when the force is inward--or toward the body--it proceeds from our intellectual nature and is called Mental; and when this force is poised,--that is, when it neither causes motion from nor toward the body, but tends to hold the body in poise,--it is said to proceed from the emotional nature, and is called Emotive.²³

In every human being one of these three natures--or states of being--is predominant, the other two being tributary or subordinate; and the degree of the predominance of the one state, together with the order of importance of the other two, are the root and source of all the various types and traits in mankind. For example, a man of intellectual habit, or one in whom the mental is predominant, will reveal his nature through subjective motion--motion which is mainly toward the body. On the other hand, in a man in whom the vital nature leads, the motion will be chiefly objective, or from the body; and if the emotional nature rules, the motion will be neither directly subjective nor objective, but may partake of either, according to the extent to which the emotional nature is invaded by the mental or the vital.²⁴

²³Morgan, op. cit., pp. 25-26.

²⁴Ibid., p. 26.

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And so we see that every act of life has its rise in one of these three states of the being, and traces its motion and motive to one of them. This predominant state is said to lead, while the other two assist or follow the former, and the resulting action corresponds to the state from whence it proceeds. Thus we find that the seat of sensation is in the physical nature, which is also the source of vitality, and reveals itself through outward or objective motion. The seat of sentiment is in the emotive nature, which is the source of the highest emotions of the soul; it reveals itself through centred or poised motion.²⁵ Delsarte's beliefs seem to be in perfect accord with Thomas Carlyle, a well-known psychologist, who stated that, "All that a man does is physiological of him. You may see how a man would fight by the way in which he sings; his courage, or want of courage, is visible in the word he utters, in the opinion he has formed, no less than in the stroke he strikes. He is one, and preaches the same self abroad in all these ways."²⁶

In this further testimony by the same eminent psychologist, there seems to be some contradiction. A closer inspection, however, reveals that both Delsarte and Carlyle were in harmonious accord. Delsarte did

²⁵Ibid., pp. 26-27.

²⁶Fleming, op. cit., p. 34.

talk of man's faculties as separable and distinct, but this was merely a convenient method utilized for his analysis. Carlyle says that,

. . . We talk of faculties as if they were distinct things, separable; as if a man had intellect, imagination, fancy, etc., as he has hands, feet, and arms. Then again we hear of a man's 'intellectual nature' and of his 'moral nature' as if these again were divisible, and existed apart. Necessities of language do prescribe such forms of utterance, but words ought not to harden into things for us. We ought to know withal, and to keep forever in mind, that these divisions are at bottom but names; that man's spiritual nature, the vital force that dwells within him, is essentially one and indivisible.²⁷

The views of the two are reconciled in the final part of the testimony, "that man's spiritual nature, the vital force that dwells within him, is essentially one and indivisible."

The study of gesture and its agents was subjected by Francois Delsarte to a profound analysis. Thus he recognized in the human body three principal agents of expression,--the head, the torso, and the limbs, each of which perform a distinct part in the economy of a character.²⁸ The head expresses the mental nature, the legs and arms the vital nature, and the torso the emotive.²⁹ Gesture assumed in each case special forms, which were

²⁷Morgan, op. cit., p. 27.

²⁸Durivage, loc. cit.

²⁹Fleming, loc. cit.



classified and described by M. Delsarte with a care and perspicuity which made his labors on this subject entirely new, and for which there was no equivalent at that time.³⁰

According to the French master there were

. . . three basic forms of movement [gesture]: movement about a center, called normal, which is vital and expresses life; movement away from a center, called eccentric, which is mental and expresses mind; movement toward a center, called concentric, which is moral and expresses soul. These three forms of movement mutually influence each other and thus give rise to nine forms, normo-normal, normo-eccentric, normo-concentric, eccentro-normal, eccentro-eccentric, eccentro-concentric, concentro-normal, concentro-eccentric, concentro-concentric. The forms of movement give rise to nine attitudes or states, and also to nine inflections or movements. All gesture, movements, or attitudes may be classified under these forms and each gesture, movement, or attitude has a special significance.³¹

It would seem that Delsarte was certainly a product of his time, as this mechanistic approach to art is carried even further in his trinitary division of the vocal apparatus.

The vocal apparatus is also triune, and each element of the trinity expresses one of the essences of being, life, mind, or soul. Speech arises from three agents: the inciting agent, the lungs, which is the vital or life principle of sound; the resonating agent, the mouth, which is the intellectual or mind principle of sound; the vibratory agent, the larynx, which is the moral or soul principle of sound. All vocal effects, arising from these fundamental agents express life, mind, or soul, and may be so classified. In addition, the Delsarte system

³⁰Durivage, loc. cit.

³¹Shaver, op. cit., p. 205.

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re-evaluates language according to the principle of the trinity and assigns degrees of value to the various parts of speech varying from one to nine.³²

Specific examples, however, speak far more eloquently than generalities, and a concise description of the above-mentioned subdivisions will be most helpful to the reader. The head (mental nature) is subdivided into the eyes and forehead (mental), the nose and cheeks (emotive), and the mouth and chin (vital). Though the eyes express the intelligence of a personality more than any other feature, they must be taken in relation with the other characteristics. The cheeks and the nose, by the flush, by the dilation and contraction of the nostrils, express the emotive nature; and it only requires one look at the mouth and chin to determine what part the vital nature plays in the drama. From the heavy lips and square chin of the sensualist to the thin lips and pointed, bony chin of the miser, there is every phase of vital nature exhibited.³³

In the area of the torso, the lungs are the region of the mental nature; the heart of the emotive, and the abdomen of the vital. When the chest is expanded it is evident that some idea, some high impulse has come into the mind. When it is unduly thrown forward, it betokens an affectation of nobility--that is, arrogance. When

³²Ibid., pp. 205-206.

³³Fleming, op. cit., pp. 34-35.



the chest is passive it becomes hollow, and suggests helplessness.³⁴

The limbs are viewed as embodying the vital nature because the more animal natures show a preponderance of muscular development in these parts. Within the subdivisions of the legs, the upper leg is vital, the lower leg emotive, as is shown in many of its natural impulses, such as kneeling. The foot is one of the most conspicuous agents of the mental nature. Its movements will often betray agitation, when the muscles of the face are kept perfectly under control.³⁵

The position and gestures of the feet and hands show the ruling force in the individual. If the body is correctly held upon the feet, if they are slightly apart, one a trifle in advance of the other, poise of the entire personality is expressed,--the emotive nature rules. If the weight goes to the front of the foot, it declares the vital nature; if the weight rests mainly on the back leg, and the advanced leg is slightly bent, it shows the thinker. If the legs are wide apart, we ascertain that the personality is commonplace, vulgar, or in a state of intoxication. If the feet are near together and point forward it indicates rusticity, unless

³⁴Ibid., p. 35.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 35-36.



the position is assumed, in which case it means servility, as in a soldier or a servant. If the weight is on the back leg, with both legs straight, it shows defiance. In an enthusiastic moment the weight will rest upon the advancing foot, the other leg free and straight.³⁶

The attitudes of the legs and feet are as varied as the swift changes of the previously cited facial characteristics.

Thus, for instance, it is not useless to know what function nature has assigned to the eye, the nose, to the mouth, in the expression of certain emotions of the soul. True passion [that which we display in life as opposed to art], which never errs, has no need of recurring to such studies; but they are indispensable to the feigned passion of the actor. How useful would it not be to the actor who wishes to represent madness or wrath, to know that the eye never expresses the sentiment experienced, but simply indicates the object of this sentiment!³⁷

In the light of present-day knowledge, it is hard to conceive of the artist's belief in such a behavioristic approach to an understanding of the human being. Though, since Delsarte's attempt to reach the core of human manifestations for artistic purposes was one of the most thorough, it is comprehensible what an intense interest the actor, painter, or sculptor must have found in the study of the human body thus analyzed from head to foot in its innumerable ways of expression. "Hence the eloquent secrets of pantomime, those imperceptible movements of

³⁶Ibid., p. 36.

³⁷Durivage, op. cit., pp. 618-619.

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great actors which produce such powerful impressions, are decomposed and subjected to laws whose evidence and simplicity are a twofold source of admiration."³⁸

Delsarte termed the shoulder "the thermometer of passion," always expressing a state of sensibility. The face should determine the passion's source. A caress is given with the shoulder. As a mother caresses her child, she lifts her shoulder, and, stretching out her arm, bends her head. The lover's heart can be told by the expression of his shoulders and hands, of which he may be perfectly unconscious. If he stands with drooping shoulders, and hands with fingers touching and passive thumbs, and says, "I love you," he surely does not tell the truth. If he means his words his shoulders lift, the arms come out from the body, the fingers open. He talks from the heart.³⁹

The elbows, also, are most expressive. Modesty and ease are expressed by their repose. Turned outward they show conceit, self-assertion, or in some cases tender protection. In ward, they show weakness, subordination of self.⁴⁰ "The corporal, the lowest officer in the army, carries his elbows out. He is lately of the ranks and must, he thinks, assert himself. As you notice the

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Fleming, op. cit., p. 37.

⁴⁰Ibid.



officer of higher rank, you come to the man of assured position and refined and modest life, and his elbows are held easily, unconsciously.⁴¹

It is the hand which, much more unconsciously than they eye--not being usually so carefully schooled--tells more than all the other features, to those who can understand. It indicates the condition of that harmonious combination of body and soul which is called the human being, and varies with the state of mind.⁴²

Delsarte calls the thumb the index of the affections, and vitality. The nourrices of Paris, whom the children call "Nou nou," used to be a feature of the Tuileries. They are the peasant nurses who have come up, usually from Brittany, to care for the infants of the rich. Their own babies have been taken back to their country home. In making his studies Delsarte paid great attention to these women. He found that when the nursing baby was very young, and consequently the "nou nou" had been recently parted from her own child, she held her little charge with stiff hands, the thumb close alongside the palm. She would care for this strange child, but she would not love it. When the charge was a little older, he would look again, and he would see how, as the love began to come, the fingers would come apart. When the true mother of the child clasped it, the thumb was spread wide from the hand.⁴³

A further exemplification of Delsarte's observations of the hand was discovered while "studying the dying and the dead The sign of death was the attraction of the

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.



thumb inward. He grew to conclude that when the heart was dead to any emotion which the circumstances surrounding the being would naturally excite, the thumb would be passive.⁴⁴

In concluding a study of Delsarte's theories, the great law of personality must be kept constantly in the foreground. There are fundamental rules of human nature, so that when the same emotion comes to the woman in the palace and the woman in the hut, the emotion is expressed by the same gesture in a greater or lesser degree. It is knowing these rules as they are shown forth naturally, and watching the development of these rules in different human beings, that give us the clue to the secrets of a heart and the habits of a body.⁴⁵

Personality is the result of that which we have inherited and that which we have made ourselves; and this personality in its outward form expresses what we are. There is little relation between the movements of the exquisite joints of a carefully refined nature, the swift and elegant movements of a perfectly poised body, on the one hand, and on the other the clumsily executed gestures of torpid limbs, stirred by a torpid mind. The importance of the act must be judged by the delicacy or non-delicacy of the organism, but it is these acts which allow us to judge of that delicacy.⁴⁶

A weighty idea will undoubtedly be accompanied by a slowness of gesture; a light idea by a quick, light gesture. A

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

grave nature is slow of movement, as of speech; a light nature rapid in gesture.⁴⁷

The direction of the gesture, again, shows the direction of the thought. A direct motion of the hand from up to down expresses affirmation--"I will." A horizontal movement from left to right expresses negation--"No!" A movement of the hand beginning at the right shoulder and moving downward toward the left side expresses annoyance; upward from left to right expresses hatred, contempt. These and a thousand other gestures, all with their specific meanings and their necessary modifications through corresponding movements of the body. It is impossible to more than barely illustrate the theory.⁴⁸ Delsarte's last word is: "Nothing is more deplorable than a gesture without a motive."⁴⁹

F. A. Durivage, while trying to classify the nature and value of M. Delsarte's labors in connection with what had been spoken or written up to that time on the art of acting, points out that the numerous precepts which had been formulated on dramatic art had hardly any other objective than the manner in which character ought to be conceived.⁵⁰

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Durivage, loc. cit.



Ingenious and multiplied observations have been employed to bring forth the delicacies of the part and its unperceived features. The intellectual strength of the actor or vocalist has been directed to the author's conception. He has been told to be pathetic here, menacing there; here to assume a slight tinge of irony transpiercing apparent politeness, or again to make his gesture a seeming contradiction of his words.⁵¹

Such an analysis of a poet's work is certainly imperative, but how far from adequate. And what an immense distance there is from the intelligence which comprehends such an analysis to the gesture which translates, from the song which moves to the inflection which interprets. It is with the new purpose which M. Delsarte has embraced that, without neglecting an understanding of the author, he might say to the actor: "This is what you must express. Now how will you do it? What will you do with your arms, with your head, with your voice? Do you know the laws of your organization? Do you know how to go to work to be pathetic, dignified, comic, or familiar, to represent the clemency of Augustus or the drunkenness of a coachman?"

Summarily, Delsarte teaches the vocalist or actor the laws of this language, of this eloquence which nature places in our eyes, in our gestures, in the suppressed or expansive tones of our voice, in the accent of speech. He teaches the actor, or, to speak more properly, the man, to know himself, to manage artistically that inimitable

⁵¹Ibid.

instrument which is man himself, all whose parts contribute to a harmonious unity.⁵²

Hence, aware of the gravity of such an assertion, I do not hesitate to proclaim here that I believe M. Delsarte's work will remain among the fundamental bases; I believe that his labors are destined to give a solid foundation to theatric art, to elevate and to ennoble it; I believe that there is no actor, no singer, however eminent, who cannot derive from the acquirements and luminous studies of M. Delsarte positive germs of development and progress. I believe that whoever makes the external interpretation of the sentiments of the human soul his business and profession, whether painter, sculptor, orator, or actor, that all men of taste who support them will applaud this attempt to create the science of expressive man; a science from which antiquity seems to have lifted the veil, and what appears willing to revive in our days, in the hands of a man, worthy by his patient and conscientious efforts to discover some of its most precious secrets.⁵³

Delsarte sought neither fame nor wealth. He could easily have secured both by remaining on the stage as an actor, after he had lost his power as a vocalist. He preferred to surrender himself in comparative retirement to the study of art and science, and to the instruction of those who sought his aid in mastering the principles of artistic expression. To the needy this instruction was imparted gratuitously, and more than one successful actor and actress was raised from penury to fortune by the benevolence of their beloved Delsarte.⁵⁴

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid.

It would be easy to cite many illustrations of the goodness and tenderness of this man. Religious fervor largely influenced his life and was the keynote of his character; but his faith was not hampered by bigotry. Like others of high rank, he held that science and art are the handmaids of religion.⁵⁵

Pages might be filled with voluntary tributes to his genius from the foremost minds of France,--Jules Janin, Theophile Gautier, Madame Emile de Girardin. Lamartine pronounced him "a sublime orator." Fiorentino, the keen, delicate, and calm critic, spoke of him as "this master, whose feeling is so true, whose style is so elevated, whose passion is so profound, that there is nothing in art so beautiful and so perfect."⁵⁶

James Steele MacKaye

Francois Delsarte's favorite disciple, James Steele MacKaye, was born June 6, 1842, in the family residence, "The Castle," near Buffalo, New York. Because he developed a strong taste for study in his earlier life, he was sent to school when three years of age. He studied Latin at the age of five.

MacKayes' Formative Years

In boyhood MacKaye instinctively began to lean toward the life of an artist and actor, even though his father had

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.



decided that he should pursue the career of a soldier. Toward this goal Colonel MacKaye sent his son, Jim, to Roe's Military Academy. "In his own book studies at Roe's Military Academy, for two years, Jim took high rank, but in the stricter regimen of military observances his high spirits were constantly devising schemes of mischievous 'non-conformity.'"⁵⁷

In the fall of 1858 the plans of Jim MacKaye as an artist had reached their crisis in his own and his father's definite decision for him to study painting abroad.⁵⁸

"In youth, Steele MacKaye studied painting, but soon developed a theatrical urge, of which his father disapproved."⁵⁹ In October, 1858, he sailed alone from New York for Paris on the S. S. Arago. Influenced by such artists as Troyon, Couture and Bouguereau, MacKaye commenced with his typical enthusiasm the study of painting and sculpture.⁶⁰

Upon his return to New York in 1860, he briefly continued his studies in art with George Inness, a prominent American painter of that time. The following few years

⁵⁷Percy MacKaye, Epoch: The Life of Steele MacKaye, 2 vols. (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1927), Vol. I, p. 57.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Rayda Wallace Dillport, "The Pupils of Delsarte." Unpublished Master's Thesis of the Louisiana State University, 1946, p. 46.

⁶⁰MacKaye, Epoch, op. cit., pp. 72-112.

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were restless years for MacKaye--years of searching by an impulsive impressionable nature for a satisfactory means of self-expression. During this particularly unsettled period of his life, MacKaye was teaching art at the Weld School at Eagleswood, New Jersey. Here on an especially constructed stage he acted a number of leading roles: Mephistopheles in Faust; Claude, Prince of Como in the Lady of Lyons; and numerous Shakespearian title roles.⁶¹

Another part of this period of MacKaye's life was devoted to military services. During the spring of 1862 he enlisted in the ranks of the Union Army and became a member of the famous Seventh Regiment of New York. Immediately after this enlistment he married Jennie Spring.

". . . It was an impulsive, war-time match, which afterwards eventuated in their divorce and in remarriage on both their parts."⁶² In the summer of 1865 Steele MacKaye married Mary Keith Medberry.

In early 1869 MacKaye, in defiance of fortune and at temporary odds with his father, took to his paint brushes. This return to painting, however, did not last long. His father, relenting in his disapproval of his son's dramatic tendencies, insisted that he undertake his studies in Paris. It was for there that he set sail in late July, 1869, to study the art of the drama.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid., p. 94.



It was during the next three years that Steele MacKaye was associated with Francois Delsarte, a relationship which was to manifest itself throughout MacKaye's professional life and contribute significantly to the theatre of the time. "When MacKaye sailed from New York, he had intentions of studying at the French Conservatoire, but upon the advice of his father, he went to see the French master of expression, Francois Delsarte. Upon the first meeting a bond joined the two great men together."⁶³ "The first words of Delsarte to Mr. MacKaye were: 'Mon fils! Mon fils!' and from that moment of meeting until the last hour of Delsarte's life, the tender devotion and love of a father and son were added to the enthusiasm and confidence of the master and pupil."⁶⁴

Because of MacKaye's artistic background and brilliant genius, Delsarte immediately recognized in him both a disciple and a co-worker. "He realized that his pupil could not only understand and apply all that he taught, but that he, too, was creative and philosophic. Within five months of their meeting, Mr. MacKaye was himself lecturing and teaching in Delsarte's 'cours', with a success which

⁶³Virginia Elizabeth Morris, "The Influence of Delsarte in America as Revealed Through the Lectures of Steele MacKaye." Unpublished Master's Thesis of the Louisiana State University, 1941, p. 7.

⁶⁴Mrs. Steele MacKaye, "Steele MacKaye and Francois Delsarte," Werner's Voice Magazine (New York, New York, 1879), XIV, No. 7, July, 1892, 187.

aroused as much enthusiasm as astonishment in Delsarte's 'lovable, loving, and generous nature'."65

Steele MacKaye's son, Percy, writes of the time following his father's introduction to the French master as being the last months of Delsarte's active life, "and in them, at the very end of his long career, there was thus strangely brought to him the pupil who was to rescue his name from the oblivion which, in spite of the loyalty of a few devoted followers, must have overtaken it" So the hours daily spent together were almost equally divided between practical training-- wherein was applied the principle already formulated-- and the search together after new applications of known truths and simpler means of reaching desired results."66

Mary MacKaye's description of the ensuing 'cours' is given an account of in her son's (Percy) voluminous work in the following comments:

The first part of the morning was given to the exposition of philosophy--the explanation of some theory, or chart. This part of the class work-- during the last months--was given by Mr. MacKaye, Delsarte from his armchair putting in a word, a nod, or smile of approval, to his little audience. After the exposition came the practical part: the recitation of a fable, a scene from a play, or perhaps a song, any of which was rendered sometimes by a pupil, sometimes by Delsarte himself.67

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶MacKaye, Epoch, I, p. 135.

⁶⁷Shaver, op. cit., p. 206.

In addition to these public lectures or lessons, Delsarte gave individual instruction. There is no material available to indicate just what happened in these sessions, which were held daily, but presumably Delsarte taught his pupils specific songs and roles and worked on articulation, movement, gesture, etc. Whether Delsarte used any kind of gymnastic exercises in his teaching was much argued later by American Delsartians. The scant evidence available would indicate that he did not."⁶⁸ A further examination of this evidence will be treated in the second chapter of this study.

On a morning in July, 1870, a friend of Mr. Mackaye's was strolling in the Parc Monceau with the American journalist, Mr. Francis Durivage.⁶⁹ A native of Boston, Durivage was then resident in Paris as the foreign correspondent of prominent New York and Boston newspapers. Mr. MacKaye was then conducting his class, to which the friend invited the young journalist. This incident was to have important repercussions which opened the arms of America to the eventual introduction of Delsartian theories by Steele MacKaye.

After the class, Mr. Durivage left, on fire with enthusiasm for all he had seen and heard there--for Delsarte himself, his philosophy, and the young American expounder, in his grace, eloquence, and

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹See page 1.

zeal. Immediately he wrote a glowing letter regarding Delsarte and MacKaye to his friend Mr. James Oakes, of Boston, who was the fides Achates of the great actor, Edwin Forrest, to whom Oakes showed the letter. By Forrest, in turn, the letter was shown to the Rev. William Rounceville Alger, a prominent Unitarian minister and author, of Boston, who was then writing his Life of Forrest; and through Alger its contents were communicated to Prof. Lewis B. Monroe, head of the Boston College of Oratory.⁷⁰

These future friends were to be instrumental in preparing the groundwork for MacKaye's successful lectures on his return to the United States.

As a result of the Franco-Prussian War, eventually leading to the siege of Paris, MacKaye and Delsarte were separated forever, MacKaye returning to America and Delsarte fleeing to his native village, Solesme.

Delsarte's great dream was to perfect all his methods and to form a great school in which he could apply them and show their results, in training artists in all departments of art. It seems that the early antagonism to Delsarte's methods was still evident in his later years.

No endowment could be secured in Paris for this school. Besides, Delsarte had many enemies in the gay capital, nor were his methods appreciated except by a very few. They were so different, not to say antagonistic, to the traditional methods of the Conservatoire, that they provoked great opposition. For this and other reasons, he concluded to come to America.⁷¹

⁷⁰MacKaye, Epoch, op. cit., p. 138.

⁷¹S. S. Curry, "Delsarte and MacKaye," Werner's Voice Magazine (New York, 1870), VII, March, 1885, 43.

So, MacKaye came to this country and sought to open the way by a course of lectures, and to interest leading people in founding the school here. His efforts were partly successful, and Delsarte began preparations for a visit to America.

MacKaye's Career in America

A detailed account of the content of the Delsartian Lectures by Steele MacKaye will be presented in Chapter II of this study. The following material indicates the importance of the institutions at which MacKaye lectured, and the prominence of the audience members.

The first of these lectures is reported to have been held on the evening of Tuesday, March 21, 1871, in the parlour of the St. James Hotel. MacKaye delivered his first lecture on Delsarte and the art of expression before an audience of the leading citizens and literati of Boston, illustrating it by his own expressive powers in acting and pantomime. The next morning, the young artist "awoke to find himself famous."⁷² The lecture was twice repeated in Boston at Tremont Temple. Each time there was a large audience."⁷³

On the evening of April 21, 1871, Steele MacKaye presented a lecture in Massachusetts Hall at Harvard College,

⁷²MacKaye, Epoch, op. cit., p. 150.

⁷³Morris, op. cit., p. 9.

where Henry W. Longfellow was the committee chairman for the event.

The reports of MacKaye's highly successful lectures in Boston brought to him another remarkable invitation from a group of artists and educators in New York to speak at Steinway Hall, in response to which he lectured at that place twice in April, with several additional repetitions [May 8, December 19] in New York and in Brooklyn, the latter by invitation of Henry Ward Beecher and others [in May].⁷⁴

All of the plans which had been made were abruptly terminated by the untimely death of Delsarte. MacKaye's interest in the establishment of an American "Cours d'Aesthetique" began to wane. It was after the death of Delsarte that he directed his energies toward the theatre. Delsarte, it must be borne in mind, was primarily interested in the training of singers. MacKaye was interested in the training of actors. Only in the hands of pupils of MacKaye and of pupils of his pupils was the system applied to "expression" or interpretation.⁷⁵ This is the beginning of another period in the life of MacKaye--that of acting, directing, and playwriting.⁷⁶ Though the "Cours d'Aesthetique" which Delsarte was to have led was abandoned, MacKaye worked and studied for twenty years, constantly developing the Science and the Philosophy of Expression. At the same time he built up and perfected ". . . that system of psycho-physical

⁷⁴MacKaye, op. cit., pp. 56-57.

⁷⁵Shaver, op. cit., p. 210.

⁷⁶Morris, op. cit., p. 10.



training which [at that time] . . . under the name of Aesthetic or Harmonic Gymnastics, formed so large a portion of the practical training of the 'Delsarte System,' as it was taught in classes and in schools, and set forth in the various textbooks now published on the subject."⁷⁷

In subsequent years, during and between his numerous and varied theatrical ventures, James Steele MacKaye continued his lectures, appearing before audiences in the many cities from Maine to Pennsylvania. Virginia Morris, Percy MacKaye, F. A. Durivage, S. S. Curry, and Claude Shaver state that MacKaye was always well-received and even marveled at by his audience. An article in The Theatre Magazine in March of 1880 seems to add a contradiction to these statements, which is included here in order that the reader might have a more complete understanding of the achievements of MacKaye:

Some years ago . . . a young enthusiast, named Mr. James Steele MacKaye, brought out himself and a pupil at a theatre then known as the St. James's, and failed. It was certainly an audacious thing to do, to come before the public for the very first time, not only as an actor, but as a teacher; but then there towered over MacKaye a kind of phantom, about which the majority had never heard anything before, good, bad, or indifferent. The phantom, we were all told, was Steele MacKaye's own master, Delsarte. It was absolutely marvellous to note how Mr. MacKaye managed to make the papers talk about what they did not understand, and even invent a phrase for the purpose of illuminating their readers, 'The Delsartian Theory.' Unfortunately, either the

⁷⁷Mrs. S. MacKaye, loc. cit.

public was not up to the mark or he himself was below it, for no one would accept him, either as Delsarte's prophet or as the greatest actor ever seen. He became, instead, the Don Quixote of the stage, and ridicule was plentifully heaped upon his devoted head. He had, however, very cleverly managed to raise quite a fog of aesthetic talk, which more or less has continued to this day, and in which his own name has always loomed forth conspicuously.⁷⁸

Though this difference of opinion concerning MacKaye's debut is interesting, it is by no means totally valid. What does seem to be evident, thus far, is that the Delsarte theories were apparently so unique to the American public, that the initial introduction of them by Steele MacKaye resulted in strong and lasting impressions in America. This fact becomes more obvious in light of the later controversies, misinterpretations, and criticisms as they appear in the next chapter of this study.

MacKaye was in England and Ireland during the winter of 1873-1874. Along with continuing his writing, he played the title role of Hamlet. He was quite successful as the first American Hamlet to brave an English audience.⁷⁹

On his return to America in the winter and autumn of 1874, MacKaye once again did an extensive lecture tour.

⁷⁸"American Notes," The Theatre Magazine (New York, New York), Vol. I--New Series, March 1, 1880, 161.

⁷⁹MacKaye, Epoch, op. cit., p. 197.

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There was an engagement of twenty nights for him in Boston alone. Below is a list of the lectures on the Philosophy of Emotion and Its Expression:⁸⁰

- I. The Mystery of Emotion
- II. Gesture as a Language
- III. The Philosophy of Laughter
- IV. The Mystic Law of Beauty
- V. The Marvels of the Human Face and Hand
- VI. Nature's Art
- VII. Masks and Faces of Society
- VIII. The Emotional Significance of the Serpent
- IX. The Philosophy of Love

MacKaye's Acting Schools

Here is an account of MacKaye's organization of dramatics schools. "As teacher, his work falls under two heads" instruction of private pupils; instruction in organized schools of acting and expression in arts."⁸¹

In the former it comprised the teaching, first of Aesthetic Philosophy, being his own system of philosophical deductions from the teachings of Delsarte, the Transcendentalists and the Evolutionists of physical science; second, Aesthetic Gymnastics, evolved and invented from his work with Delsarte; third, the Principles of Stage Business, deduced from the second in relation to his own practical experience in the theatre.⁸²

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 231.

⁸¹Percy MacKaye, "Steele MacKaye, The Drama Magazine (Chicago: 1911), No. 4, 146-47.

⁸²Ibid.

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In the schools organized by him, it comprised the second and third above named, together with rehearsals in the professional theatre.

Private pupils came to him intermittently during two decades for instruction. Through them, the seeds of his artistic sowing bore fruit in various fields: in the church, through the Rev. William R. Alger, of Boston; in the organized teaching of expression, Prof. Lewis B. Monroe, of the Boston University, Dr. S. S. Curry, of Boston, Mr. Franklin H. Sargent, of New York; in universities, Miss May Monroe, of Vassar, Mr. George Riddle, at Harvard; in Educational Theatre work, Mrs. Emma Sheridan Fry; in the theatre itself, his son and pupil, William Fayson MacKaye (an actor of noble promise, who died at twenty-one years of age), John McCulloch, Maurice Barrymore, Edwin Forrest, Matilda Heron, and other actors and actresses who acknowledged his teachings and influence; in general society, through scores of unprofessional men and women.⁸³

Four schools were known to have been organized by him: The School of Expression, or Conservatoire Esthetique, in 1877, at 23 Union Square, New York; the Lyceum Theatre School, in 1884, New York; MacKaye's School of Acting and Expression in Art, in 1885, in New York; the Stage School

⁸³Ibid., 151-52.



of the MacKaye Spectatorium, in 1893, Chicago. All of these, but the second, were of brief duration.

MacKaye wrote a concise prospectus for his first school at 23 Union Square. This prospectus gives some indications of the ideals which he aspired to:

When managers can produce fine art with success, personal pride and self-respect will lead them to prefer it to all others; but actors and actresses of inferior culture and character can only give life to plays on a level with themselves; and the public, though quick to sympathize with what is aspiring, and anxious to applaud what is good, can never be induced to patronize a play, however noble itself, whose ideals are only half realized, or are rendered ridiculous by those who attempt to interpret. It is far more agreeable to see something commonplace well done than to see something fine unworthily done; for nothing is more revolting than the abasement of the sublime from its high and modest simplicity by the loud, vulgar, or weak action of the mediocre and trivial actor.⁸⁴

MacKaye's chief associate in the Lyceum Theatre School was Mr. Franklin H. Sargent. This was just after or during the time of his (MacKaye's) lectures in the studio of Mrs. George Hall. Assisting the founder and his associate was Mr. David Belasco, who later went forth to carry the more purely theatrical principles to a perfection of his own.⁸⁵ The Lyceum Theatre School was afterward continued as the Academy of Dramatic Arts and prospered for many years under the direction of Franklin Sargeant. This institution is still in existence today.

⁸⁴Ibid. Steele MacKaye's original prospectus, cited by Percy MacKaye.

⁸⁵Ibid.

A previously cited article from The Theatre Magazine again offers an interesting difference to the majority of opinions on Steele MacKaye.

Not successful on the stage, he determined to succeed off. He opened, in Union Square, 'a school for drama,' and erected a stage in his back bedroom, which was very small, but very complete, and here he taught the young histrionic idea how to shoot. Several of his pupils soon manifested that his theories, when modified, carried into practice, made admirable actors. Possessed of a plucky spirit, which nothing could or can daunt, Mr. MacKaye--who, mind you, is a perfect gentleman in every sense of the word: cultivated, cultured, and honest as the days in July are long--made many valuable friends, and with their aid has at last succeeded in providing for New York a theatre which he advertises is to be "a wholesome place of wholesome amusement."⁸⁶

It would seem that, despite any negative opinions as to his worth as a performer, MacKaye was a theatrical personage of many valuable attributes, not the least of which being a gifted teacher. Of this gift, Percy MacKaye states:

In his methods of teaching, my father reduced little to writing, but taught by personal instigation and exemplification, often far exceeding the set hours of routine in his enthusiasm. Some chaotic manuscript of his exists; but, in the stress of other labors, the books on Aesthetic Philosophy and Stage Technique, which he had clearly formulated mentally and always planned to write, were never written.⁸⁷

⁸⁶"American Notes," op. cit., p. 161.

⁸⁷MacKaye, Epoch, op. cit., p. 153.

MacKaye--Playwright and Producer

In 1878 MacKaye presented a series of twelve lectures on the philosophy of expression in the Boston School of Oratory, of which the previously mentioned Professor Lewis Monroe was the founder and dean. The lectures were attended by the entire school and were seemingly quite successful. Percy states that hereafter his father made no further lecture tours until the year 1885. In the meantime he had written eleven plays, six of which he produced himself.⁸⁸ MacKaye was eventually to write "thirty plays, including Hazel Kirke, Won at Last, Through the Dark, Paul Kauvar, Money Mad, A Fool's Errand and In Spite of All. He acted in seventeen different roles from his plays."⁸⁹ The best of the group are Hazel Kirke (1880), In Spite of All (1885), and Dakolar (1885).⁹⁰

In order to carry out his ideas he remodelled the old Fifth Avenue Theatre, installing elaborate scenic apparatus, overhead and indirect stage lighting, and a double movable stage. It opened in 1879 as the Madison Square Theatre.

⁸⁸ Ibid., II, xvi.

⁸⁹ Dillport, loc. cit.

⁹⁰ MacKaye, Epoch, loc. cit.

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Here his best play, Hazel Kirke, was first put on, and ran for nearly two years, though owing to MacKaye's unbusinesslike methods he received very little money from it. It was frequently revived and was seen in London, where MacKaye's first plays, mainly adaptations and collaborations had been done.⁹¹

Unable to continue working at the Madison Square Theatre, he went to the Lyceum on Fourth Avenue, installed electric lighting, and established the school mentioned previously.⁹²

During the winter of 1885-1886, MacKaye lectured and taught private pupils at his New York home, nor did he ever completely relinquish teaching and lecturing, though these were kept at a minimum. "During the following years MacKaye continued to instruct private pupils and to make an occasional lecture tour. On several occasions he attempted to found a school similar to the 'Cours D'Esthetique Appliquee,' but his efforts came to naught as other interests drew him away."⁹³ Aside from several articles in Werner's Magazine,⁹⁴ nothing was written, or at least published.

In late November, 1885, MacKaye recieved an invitation from the President and twenty professors of Cornell

⁹¹Geoffrey Cumberlege (ed.), Oxford Companion to the Theatre (London-New York-Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1951), 494.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Shaver, op. cit., p. 209.

⁹⁴Ibid., (Mr. Shaver refers to four articles by F. A. Durivage which appeared in Werner's Voice Magazine in April, May, June, August, 1887.)



University, asking him to renew his activities in the lecture field by delivering a lecture at that university. As a result of this invitation, MacKaye made a lecture tour from December, 1885, to February, 1886. He lectured in Ithaca, Utica, Buffalo, Rochester and Syracuse, New York.⁹⁵

The latter part of the life of MacKaye was primarily devoted to the designing and building of a magnificent theatre, called the Spectatorium, for the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. Because of financial reverses, this gigantic project, fully comprehensible only in the mind of its creator, was never completed. In its place was substituted the Scenitorium, which, in many respects, was a miniature of the Spectatorium. It is these projects, in particular the Spectatorium, which will be the primary concern in the final chapter of this thesis.

There is a seeming paradox in the statement that Delsarte and his theories seem to occupy a weaker position in the life of MacKaye in his later years, and the statement that the Spectatorium was a direct product of Delsartian theories as MacKaye adapted them. However, as MacKaye gave up extensive lecturing in pursuit of his great project, his re-working of the French master's life work is clearly evident. A summation at the end of Chapter II of this study should help to strengthen these assertions.

⁹⁵MacKaye, Epoch, op. cit., pp. 59-60.

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The greatness of the proposed Spectatorium emphasized the success of the theatres in New York which MacKaye renovated and managed in earlier years. These theatres were the St. James, Madison Square and the Lyceum. Some inventions of MacKaye which had been included within these theatres were the "double stage," ventilation by machinery, the folding theatre chair, and the sliding stage.⁹⁶

"On the 23rd of February, 1894, James Steele MacKaye, because of his wretched state of health, left Chicago and his Scenitorium for a period of rest in California. He died on the train, February 25, 1894"⁹⁷. . . . "Henry Irving, another player of the role of Hamlet, sent a wreath to MacKaye's funeral on which were the following words of tribute: 'Good-night, Sweet Prince!'"⁹⁸

⁹⁶Morris, op. cit., p. 15.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸MacKaye, Epoch, op. cit., p. 462.



CHAPTER II

AN EXAMINATION OF MACKAYE'S PRESENTATION OF DELSARTIANISM IN AMERICA

It is now relevant to turn to a closer inspection of the Delsartian techniques as James Steele MacKaye presented them to the American public in 1871. The innovations and additions which occurred in the development of Delsartian principles in later years were the result of the initial painstaking labors on the parts of both Francois Delsarte and Steele MacKaye, and any new discoveries that the latter made were immediately accepted by Delsarte. The system, as MacKaye first introduced it, must have been very similar to what he and the master first taught in Paris, France, a short time before. What becomes very evident, however, is that MacKaye became very much concerned with his own contributions. These, along with many aspects of Delsarte's original theories and techniques evolve and become incorporated into the Spectatorium.

"Delsarte" soon became a household word after its introduction in America. The name was plagiarized, and became synonymous with everything from foundation garments and mere physical culture to elocution and voice. These misconceptions, abuses, quackeries, and fraudulent practices

which were later centered around the Delsarte name caused much confusion. MacKaye was probably very much responsible for it, as he never had the time to write down and publish the true theories and techniques which he had a significant part in developing. It is necessary to clarify some of this confusion before elaborating further upon the later influences in the American theatre with which MacKaye was so immediately concerned.

Along with clarifying the issues already mentioned, this chapter will present some pertinent newspaper reviews of MacKaye's lectures, personal correspondence, letters, and other miscellaneous data that further clarify any misconceptions as to MacKaye's role as the founder of Delsartian Methods in America, and enlighten the reader as to his degree of success in this venture.

Virginia Morris treats of the first matter in her thesis on "The Influence of Delsarte in America as Revealed Through the Lectures of Steele MacKaye." These lectures, I might add, are dealt with in a much more detailed manner than the scope of this study will permit; however there are some considerations which must be noted. "A pertinent question which could be asked in this thesis is what material, if any, did Steele MacKaye contribute to the Delsarte System of Expression? Did MacKaye in his lectures teach only Delsarte, or did he also include his own

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philosophy?"⁹⁹ The answers to the above questions can be derived after careful scrutiny of several sources.

Percy MacKaye, son and biographer of Steele MacKaye, adheres to the viewpoint that his father had definite ideas of attitudes and poses even before his meeting with Delsarte. As proof of this statement, Percy MacKaye describes the following episode:

While in the service of his country, Steele MacKaye posed for J.Q.A. Ward, a sculptor. One day MacKaye visited the studio of Ward and found the man quite irritated. Ward, while striving to achieve a pensive attitude for his statue of Shakespeare, had worked hours to no avail. The results seemed negative. MacKaye assured him: "That's simple, J.Q.; instead of making him pensive, you've made him sleepy. The difference in pose is slight but radical. It affects the whole body--legs, torso as well as head. The posture of thought should be like this."¹⁰⁰ MacKaye then assumed this position while Ward worked furiously at his clay to catch the pose.

In a notebook of Steele MacKaye's dated February 7, 1862, there are detailed studies and analyses of expression, from which the following is an excerpt:

In the expression of the passions there is a compound influence at work. Let us contemplate

⁹⁹Morris, op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁰⁰MacKaye, Epoch, I, op. cit., p. 79.

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the appearance of terror: Eye intently fixed upon the object of his fear; the eyebrows elevated to the utmost; the eye largely uncovered; with hesitating and bewildered steps, his eyes wildly and rapidly in search of something Observe him further: a spasm in his breast; the muscles of his neck and shoulders in action, his breath short and rapid; there is a convulsive motion of his lips, a tremor on his hollow cheek, a gulping and catching of his throat. His heart knocks at his ribs while yet there is no circulation, for his lips and cheeks are ashy pale¹⁰¹

Further readings in these notebook excerpts betray a remarkable resemblance to manifestations of expression with which Delsarte was concerned. And it was to be several years before the two geniuses were to meet.

"With this material as a background, the reader may safely conclude that Steele MacKaye, in his own thinking, made critical observations concerning expression and bodily attitudes; consequently, additions of MacKaye to the Delsarte system would seem only natural."¹⁰²

Franklin Sargeant wrote in 1924; ". . . He [MacKaye] developed a great deal that Delsarte had left in an unfinished state, methodised much that was left in a purely fanciful form by his master."¹⁰³

Probably the greatest amount of confusion as to the identity of the creator centers around the invention of "Aesthetic of Harmonic Gymnastics." It is said that Delsarte taught a series of gestures, beautiful and

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁰²Morris, op. cit., p. 21.

¹⁰³MacKaye, Epoch, op. cit., p. 457.

expressive in character, which were very difficult to execute. Mr. MacKaye learned them very rapidly, due to the preliminary training through which he put himself. The exercises invented for this preliminary training, and the principles discovered at that time became known as Harmonic Gymnastics.¹⁰⁴

During the late 1800's, Madame Gerald, Delsarte's daughter, made a visit to this country. It was shortly after this visit that the family of Steele MacKaye was barraged with letters of inquiry regarding Delsarte--his life, his methods, and the difference between his teaching and that of Mr. MacKaye. To these letters Mrs. Steele MacKaye, in defense of her husband, wrote an article in July, 1892, edition of Werner's Voice Magazine, an article which does much to clarify the "gymnastics" issue.

Claude Shaver quotes from an article by E. Miriam Coyriere, "Mme. Gerald's Visit to America," which seems to support MacKaye as the originator of "Harmonic Gymnastics." Mme. Gerald stated:

My father taught expression, . . . he did not teach gymnastics. I do not say your relaxing exercises and posings are not valuable, for I believe they may be for certain purposes; but I do say that my father did not teach them . . . But he, [referring to Steele MacKaye] like everybody else, has not been content to leave Delsarte's work as the master left it, but has added material of his own devising.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴Mrs. Steele MacKaye, op. cit., p. 138.

¹⁰⁵Werner's Voice Magazine, XIV (April, 1892), 103.

This seems a rather ungrateful criticism of the man considered as a replacement for his lost son. MacKaye, however, wrote his wife April 11, 1892:

In relation to Harmonic--or as I first called them, Aesthetic Gymnastics--they are, in philosophy as well as in form absolutely my own alone, though founded in part, upon some of the principles formulated by Delsarte.¹⁰⁶

To explain this seeming contradiction, he continues the letter and states:

In the beginning of my teaching I never dreamed of separating my work from his for it was done in the same spirit as his It is only now, when others are teaching so much nonsense in his name, and basing it upon the truths stolen from me, that I am forced to do this. It is not done to detract from the desert of Delsarte, but to defend us both from the frauds who trade upon and obscure . . . our philosophy as well as our own names.¹⁰⁷

The article of Mrs. Steele MacKaye already cited affirms and elaborates upon the above:

Mr. MacKaye made no attempt to separate his own contributions from the body of Delsarte's work Mr. MacKaye has now been working and studying for over twenty years, and during that time he has been constantly developing the Science as well as the Philosophy of Expression; at the same time building up and perfecting that system of psycho-physical training whose beginnings were made while he was still with Delsarte, and which today, under the name of aesthetic or harmonic gymnastics forms so large a portion of the practical training of the 'Delsarte System' as it is taught in classes and in schools, and set forth in the various textbooks now published on this subject One of the most important principles underlying the system of

¹⁰⁶ MacKaye, Epoch, II, op. cit., p. 270.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 270-271.

harmonic gymnastics is that of relaxation. This principle was discovered by Mr. MacKaye alone In regard also to the principle of poise--which is another of Mr. MacKaye's discoveries--many of the exercises . . . are abused and misunderstood to an extent which often robs them of every feature of grace, and beauty, and therefore of any hope of usefulness.¹⁰⁸

In reference to an item in the Boston Journal by M. Alfred Giraudet, a distinguished pupil of Delsarte who occupied one of the most important chairs in the National Conservatory of Paris, an interesting conversation is cited which throws further light on the evidence thus far. Someone asked M. Giraudet if Delsarte applied gymnastics to voice culture and declamation, to which he replied, "No, not at all, as far as I know. With the exception of two or three exercises for the development of the suppleness of the arms, Delsarte paid no attention to gymnastics in general."¹⁰⁹

Both Mme. Gerald and M. Giraudet are entirely right. Delsarte never taught gymnastics. The whole system of aesthetic or harmonic gymnastics is, from the first word to the last, entirely of Mr. MacKaye's invention. Delsarte did indeed teach a series of gestures which were very beautiful and expressive in character, but exceedingly intricate and difficult of imitation To the amazement, yet entire satisfaction of Delsarte, Mr. MacKaye mastered them in three months. This result was accomplished, first, by the most diligent study in analyzing the movements, and, after this analysis in overcoming the physical obstacles existing in his own organization to the realization of perfection in these movements. In short, it was during the

¹⁰⁸Mrs. Steele MacKaye, op. cit., pp. 188-89.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., citing the Boston Journal, no date.

study of this series of gestures that the necessity of a preliminary training was made apparent, and the exercises then invented for this purpose, and the principles at that time discovered are the foundation stones of that system now known as Harmonic Gymnastics. Mr. MacKaye afterward taught something of this system of mento-muscular movements to one of his fellow students, applying his newly discovered principles and exercises with a result¹¹⁰ which aroused Delsarte's delighted enthusiasm.

On the other hand, the Rev. W. R. Alger stated that Delsarte did, indeed, teach aesthetic gymnastics as part of his system. Alger himself studied with Gustave Delsarte, son of Francois, during the year following the death of the master himself. He later wrote that both he and another student (Mrs. Henrietta Russell) found that Gustave taught, as imparted to him by his father, the same system of expression, the same laws and rules, the same gymnastic training, give at a subsequent date by Mr. MacKaye to his pupils, and still later, published in several books by Miss Genevieve Stebbins.¹¹¹ Later in the same statement Alger commented, "Steele MacKaye no doubt has corrected some errors in it, developed some portions of it further, made some additions to it, and improved the name by changing it from 'aesthetic' to 'harmonic.'"¹¹²

Steele MacKaye told Alger in 1869 that,

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Shaver, op. cit., p. 210.

¹¹²Ibid., pp. 210-11.

The first thing Delsarte does, when he takes charge of a pupil, is to put him through a series of decomposing motions, to liberate every joint, articulators and muscles (sic) of the body; next, he puts him through a series of recomposing exercises to adjust the organism for free and economic action as a harmonic whole

Then Alger states,

. . . At that very interview, Mr. MacKaye unequivocally said that this systematic arrangement of liberating and harmonizing exercises was designed by Delsarte as 'Aesthetic Gymnastics.'¹¹³

Alger sums up his feelings on the matter by recognising that, "There is due to him [MacKaye] also the immense and imperishable credit of lovingly and livingly receiving it from its author and communicating its outlines to the public for perpetual transmission . . . , but the integral system itself, as such, was constructed and bequeathed to mankind by Francois Delsarte."¹¹⁴

The resultant misconception of Delsarte's theories in America are partially explained by Claude Shaver. He deduces from the entire weight of evidence that all claims as to MacKaye's inventing harmonic gymnastics are valid:

MacKaye accepted the trinitary concept of Delsarte, and, in general, the whole speculative philosophy, but being less profoundly religious than Delsarte, or at least not Catholic in religion, he was probably less interested in the philosophical implications than in the practical aspects. [This becomes a very important fact later in this study.] Thus MacKaye seems to be responsible for the emphasis on gesture in the Delsarte system as taught in America, although . . . MacKaye's

¹¹³ Morris, op. cit., pp. 23-24.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

failure to make a clear and unambiguous statement about the system and his own contributions to it contributed to the conversion of the system ⁱⁿ America into a method of physical culture.¹¹⁵

A tentative conclusion can safely be drawn at this point in the study: The system of expression upon which MacKaye lectured was basically that of Delsarte.

A valuable source of information in the proceeding pages will be a thesis of Miss Virginia Morris, "The influence of Delsarte in America as Revealed Through the Lectures of Steele MacKaye," an unpublished M.A. thesis from the Louisiana State University. It is relevant to a small portion of my study, as it includes actual lectures on file in the forementioned school.

Since Delsartian theories have already been summarized in the first chapter of my study, the material utilized at this time will be specifically limited to the principles of the system that were stressed by MacKaye, and the manner in which they were conveyed. This should clarify somewhat the degree to which Delsartian influences can be discerned in MacKaye's artistic nature, and how these influences had a direct bearing upon the theatrical goals he set for himself in his final years. These goals, the most important of which is the Spectatorium, will be treated in Chapter III of this study.

As to the lecture material,

¹¹⁵Shaver, loc. cit.

Like Delsarte, unfortunately, MacKaye, the genuine disciple, did not publish any of his material on this system. He did, however, leave notebooks, manuscripts, and lectures. At his death, this material of MacKaye came into the possession of Dr. S. S. Curry, who in turn failed to publish any exposition of the Delsarte system. After the death of Curry, the material came into the possession of Mr. Martin Luther, president of the Expression Company, publishers, Boston, Massachusetts. After a number of years, this material of MacKaye, along with other materials of W. R. Alger, Curry and others, was sent to the Speech Department of Louisiana State University.¹¹⁶

Some of MacKaye's lectures were lost or not available, but what remains is perhaps a fair sampling of what was taught to expression teachers, students and actors here in America according to MacKaye's individual approach.

Miss Morris gives a detailed description of the lectures as they exist today in their original handwritten form; however, the limitations of the scope of this study will not permit such utilization, nor would such information be vital to the purposes stated herein. It is pertinent, though, to note the actual lectures which exist and are helpful to this study:

Gesture as a Language; Delsarte's System of Dramatic Art;
Scientific Basis of Aesthetics, a series of lectures; and
Delsarte and His philosophy of Emotion.

In Gesture As A Language, MacKaye emphasizes the importance of "address" (by this he means suitable manners). Whether one is seeking to realize his ambition of learning,

¹¹⁶Morris, op. cit., pp. 2-3.

wealth, or public office he must have proper manners for the success of such a venture. These "manners" do not only assist in securing the good will of neighbors, but tend to strengthen in a person his self-respect. From this he asserts that gesture as a language creates all the eloquence of our manners and exerts more influence than words themselves; therefore, it is superior to speech. As MacKaye states, "It gesture often tells in an instant a story that would require a lifetime of words to reveal."¹¹⁷

It is the tones of the voice which are expressive of our vital condition, the sensual self. Articulation and speech are products of one's reflective self; they correspond to the inward speech--thought. Pantomime manifests a person's will and the moral condition of the soul. It is most patent because it reveals the profoundest depths of human nature. In summation MacKaye states that tone is one product of the lungs, mouth and larynx. Speech is the product of the tongue, lips, and teeth, and pantomime the product of the cooperation of torso, head, and limbs. The human body is but the clothing of the human soul. "Precisely as we perceive in man a vital, mental and moral principle of being--so in his body we find vital, mental and moral agents of expression."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷Steele MacKaye, "Gesture As a Language," cited by Virginia Morris, loc. cit.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

From the division of the body into three distinct parts; head, limbs, and torso, MacKaye concludes, "Thus might we go through with the examination of all the expressive portions of the human body and would find them constantly subdividing into three distinct parts, and if I had time I could show you by the nature of their expressions that these divisions naturally classified themselves into vital, mental and moral agents of expression."¹¹⁹

The next division is made in the principles of expression of which there are three classes:

1. Universal principle of expression underlying all expression among men.
2. Individual principles, those that modify one's expression according to his own individuality.
3. Perfection principles, those which tend to ennoble both the man and his manners.

Then, a further sub-division of these principles is made; the universal physical being divided into dynamic, physiological and phsiogromical principles. Then the dynamic principles are stated as being the laws of velocity, extension and attitude. These laws may be defined as follows:¹²⁰

1. Law of velocity--velocity is in proportion to the mass moved and the force moving.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Ibid., pp. 15-30.

2. Law of extension--the extension is in proportion to the unsustained vehemence of emotion.

3. Law of attitude--gestures for positive emotion rises, negative emotion falls.

The law of muscular action states that the muscular action of the body is in proportion to the intensity of feeling, thought and purity of the affective emotion.

The law of visceral action states that visceral action is properly the product of the involuntary nervous system and therefore in proportion to the suspension of voluntary nervous action is the action of the visceral system of the body under the influence of the emotional.

The last law explains that abnormal nervous action always tends to produce reactions: "When the nervous action is stimulated by feeling, pleasant or painful, if uncontrolled by the mind or will, it discharges its force irregularly upon the visceral and muscular systems most--as are most habitually used by the individual."¹²¹

It would seem that these "laws" were stated by Pell-sarte as further evidence of the trinitary division into which he makes all his theories fit. Also, these "laws" are an exemplification of what he terms the "science of art" which formed the basis of his work. To simplify these "laws" into more practical, artistic meanings, it might be asserted

¹²¹Ibid.

that: (1) the speed of movement depends on bodily proportions, plus the motivating force moving them; (2) the limbs of the body will extend as far as continued force is propelling them, until their furthest length terminates the extension; (3) positive, or assertive, emotions are manifested in rising motions, negative emotions are manifested in downward movements; (4) feelings, thoughts, etc., are partially manifested in muscular movements; (5) since emotional reactions are connected with the nervous system, of which the visceral--internal organs of the body--action is a product, it is concluded that the visceral system is influenced by the emotional conditions.

The three physiognomical principles are form, force, and inflection. The law of form explains that sensation or feelings excite movements from the center to circumference (eccentric motion) physical-eccentric; thought or reflection excites movement from the circumference to the center, mental-concentric; and affection or love excites a normal equilibrium of motion about the center. Details of this are stated in Chapter I of this study.

The Law of force--states that conscious force assumes feeble attitudes; conscious weakness assumes strong attitudes. And finally, the law of inflection explains that perpendicular inflections in gesture are affirmative; horizontal are negative and oblique inflections in gesture are suspension.

In the second division of the principles of expression, it is noted that individual principles assume three distinctions; (1) constitutional principles relating to the temperament of an individual; (2) habitual principles relating to the habitual life of an individual; and (3) temporal laws of expression relating to the age of an individual.

Constitutional laws of expression are divided into three temperaments; (1) the vital temperament tends to intemperance (extreme) of expression; (2) the mental temperament tends to give subtlety and nervous energy to expression; and (3) the moral temperament tends to give coldness and restraint to expression.

the habitual laws of expression are also of three kinds: (1) the law of occupation, which states that those portions of the frame that are most used in occupation become most prominent in expression; (2) the law relating to education, which states that according to the degree of culture complexity, subtlety and command of expression are developed; and (3) the law relating to social position, which states that the tendency to have ease of bearing and conventionality of expression will be in proportion to the height of the social sphere.

Temporal laws relate to the three general ages in man: (1) youth is expansive and tends to vital (normal movement) forces in expansion; (2) maturity is normal and

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tends to both mental and vital forms; while (3) old age is contracted and tends to concentric (reduced, in toward the center) forms of expression as well as strong attitudes of the body.

Turning next to the third principle, one finds that there are three laws involved. They are the laws of consistency, precision and opposition.

Briefly, the law of consistency is the measure of sincerity in expression. All genuine expression of emotion is consistent. The law of precision states that economy of force demands precision of motion. Precision gives subtlety, directness and expression.

The law of opposition creates the equilibrium of motion. MacKaye explains: "This is the law of power in mechanics, law of beauty in form, the law of grace in movement and the law of significance in all expression."¹²²

MacKaye concluded this lecture by discussing the lack of training for men in their outward movement as well as their inward emotion.

". . . Spiritual conditions which solidify the substance of manhood in the soul"¹²³ are lacking. What we have need of is a culture and a science which will reveal the hidden springs of human nature, and illuminate one's ideals

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid.

of manhood. Such a culture can only come by one's giving more heed to beauty: sincerity to his manners.

MacKaye stated, ". . . If we would ennoble the inward life of man, we must seek to surround him with forms more lovely and grand."¹²⁴ Science and art would both work towards this end.

The following lecture, "A Glimpse of Delsarte's Scientific System of Dramatic Expression," need only be briefly summarized. It is an earlier lecture which compliments his then living friend, Delsarte, together with the main features of the latter's system of dramatic art.

The Delsarte system, having the simplicity of science, is no mystery at all. Delsarte, by the use of his system, seeks to make the actor an artist and to cause him to lose his own personality and adopt that one which is necessary for the role he is acting. The actor who is a follower of Delsarte is taught to express an emotion according to the laws of that emotion--the use of the appropriate and most powerful presentation of the impassioned thought. MacKaye stated that the use of the laws of expression will gradually become instinctive and will actually enter into the vital nature of the actor; thus, "a scientific and perfectly correct manifestation of passion will become spontaneous."¹²⁵

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵Steele MacKaye, cited by Virginia Morris, op. cit., pp. 20-25.

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From the preceding line of thought, MacKaye concludes that there must be an equal development of the emotional and the mechanical for a perfect artist. The genius, the soul, is God-given, but the mastery of the instrument is obtained by incessant training and careful study. Such training reduced to a scientific basis is supplied by the system of Delsarte.

The French master believed that art is emotion passed through thought and fixed in form. This definition would indicate the relationship of the mechanical to that of the spiritual in art. Emotion and thought come before form, but all three are necessary in art, and spontaneity is or should be in no way affected because of a scientific basis for the art.

The following statement is highly significant, not because of its bearing on Delsartian principles, but because it reveals a somewhat paradoxical element in MacKaye's artistic nature. Though MacKaye seems to be criticizing theatrical trends of the time, it soon becomes evident that he was very much a product of the theatre of his time, or better stated, a leading force in the theatre of his time. MacKaye comments:

The scene painter, the machinist, and the costumer are too often the real stars of the stage today, and in every branch of art sensational effects are made more prominent than earnest thought or pure emotion. Such a state tends to excite and develop the sensual rather than the spiritual side of society.¹²⁶

¹²⁶Ibid.

Unless some radical change took place in MacKaye-- and there is no evidence to support this view--it is quite likely that he was referring to scenery, machinery, and costumes as entities removed from the artistic whole. MacKaye's gifts as an inventor of machines, creator of realistic effects and scenery, action accompanied by music, acting with little dialogue, can be verified. This was the same MacKaye who preached the gospel of Delsarte. Somewhere along the way he reconciled any existing contradictions, and fused his knowledge into an harmonious whole.

During the course of this lecture on Delsarte's 'science' MacKaye gave illustrations of the nine cries of grief, nine kinds of laughter, nine elementary principles of dramatic art, element of attitude in gesture and the element of form in gesture.

The system of Delsarte exercises have a triple purpose: (1) to develop the greatest physical power of expression by giving each muscle and joint its fullest and freest play; (2) to give a perfect command of gradation and contrast in the manifestation of emotion; and (3) to cultivate the habit of observing instinctively scientific principles of power and truth in gesture, and thus to secure to spontaneous emotion a prompt and perfect form of expression.¹²⁷

¹²⁷Ibid.

A program of exercises follow. They are exercises for the arms, legs and the face particularly. MacKaye created such facial expressions as indifference, distress, grief, pain, terror, amazement and stupidity. He presented the contrasts in gestures as in the cases of shame and indignation, supplication and fury.

The last phase of the demonstration was a presentation of the nine gradations of insanity from the first degree of brooding to idioey, the ninth degree.

Several studies could be done on various aspects of the lectures as they exist today. For purposes of this study it is now expedient to give a concise summary of the Delsartian Philosophy as it was taught by James Steele MacKaye, and a glimpse of his manner of instruction or approach as they are evident in his lectures.

I. Highlights of the Delsarte Philosophy and System of Expression

The "Divine Method" is a source of inspiration and expression for the Delsarte system as expounded by Steele MacKaye in his lectures. This method is "omnipotent, omnipresent and implies omniscience."¹²⁸ It is universal. The application of this method to be effective must be studied, analyzed and industriously used.

There are a great many laws to be derived from this "Divine Method" which will develop the individual and perfect

¹²⁸MacKaye, cited by Morris, op. cit., pp. 45-55.

the race. A knowledge of these laws constitutes the "scientific basis of aesthetics."¹²⁹

Considering the great principles of the "Divine Method," onw finds the first to be the Trinity. This principle underlies the existence of all things. A trinity is a "unity of three things each of which is essential to the other two, each co-existing in time, co-penetrating in space and cooperating in motion."¹³⁰ Because there is a mutual influence of each of these three upon the other two, "nine essential factors of universal phenomena" are evolved.¹³¹ This trinity extends to human nature. All persons feel, think and reflect because of the fact that there exists in human nature three principles of being: a vital, a mental and a moral one. "Each of these principles of being implies power of perception and power of performance peculiar to itself. Each power, however, cooperates with the other two."¹³² The mutual influence and cooperation of one with the other two formulates the principle of circumincession. By the "principe du circumincession," translated as the "principle of inter-twining," "the body expresses not only soul, but, to a degree, both life and mind."¹³³

¹²⁹Ibid.

¹³⁰Ibid.

¹³¹Ibid.

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³S. S. Curry, The Province of Expression, cited by Claude Shaver, op. cit., p. 205.

The second "divine" principle is opposition. This law states that in Nature there are found numerous lines of opposing force. "Two points with a common center oppose each other." Opposition is not antagonistic. ". . . Two lines diverging opposed to each other will meet somewhere, but two lines in the same direction will never meet."¹³⁴ This principle of opposition is the law of unity in nature. "It is the law that governs the perfect development of everything."¹³⁵

The third "divine" principle is evolution. The order of evolution with knowledge is first the extremes and then the center, but when the mind becomes perfected by the "Divine Method," the evolution is from the center to the surface. This principle governs in training and development.

The greater part of MacKaye's lectures is taken up with the application of the "Divine Method," to human expression. The "true" artist goes to nature for inspiration and the knowledge of the "Divine Method." Since genius is a matter of development and training, the system of expression described by MacKaye would be beneficial to all persons. Perception comes first, then performance. Both are essential to expression.

The perfect system of training is that which will perfect one's power of manifesting what is mystic in himself

¹³⁴MacKaye, cited by Morris, loc. cit.

¹³⁵Ibid.

after perfecting his power to perceive the mystic in nature.

There is a difference between emotion and expression--expression is the manifestation of emotion, which is the designer of the expression. This is adequate proof for the necessity of impression before expression.

The universal trinity--something that exists (physical or vital), something that guides (mental) and something that impels (moral)--is found in the human body. Each of these principles, in the universe and in humanity, has a characteristic form and motion. The vital principle is convex in form, with movement about a center. The mental is concave and eccentric, while the moral is concentric--toward a center.

These three principles, to be perfect, must be in equilibrium with the other two principles. An overdevelopment of one will produce a "vice" (here meaning an imbalance of one or more of the principles.)

As the following chart illustrates, there is a series of trinities within the large trinity: the vital, mental and moral.

vital (normal)	vital motion	moral space	mental time
moral (concentric)	force	form	purpose
mental (eccentric)	power manifested by beauty	love manifested by goodness	wisdom manifested by truth



A perfection of the three principles, love, wisdom, and power and their outward manifestations is in proportion to the unity of each with the other.

By a continuous following of the Delsarte principle both in theory and practical application to human expression, one may become perfect in spontaneous expression. "Deeds in man's life become spontaneous if continuously performed, the action being deposited in the central nervous system."¹³⁶

"There must be a perfect unity of the whole man in order to make any part perfect in expression."¹³⁷

The three main trinities in the body which serve as agents of expression are the head, torso and limbs. These parts are further subdivided, their combinations producing nine expressions for each grouping of three. It is by first knowing the different divisions and what the motion of each manifests and then applying such knowledge that perfect expression is obtained.

The three languages of emotion in man (another trinity) are voice, speech, and pantomime. The last one mentioned over-shadows the other two in importance. Movement and gesture are the vital forms of expression. Voice plays a minor role. This principle, along with the principle of circumlocution and its importance, was found to be

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷Ibid.

emphasized in the French notes of MacKaye made while a pupil of Delsarte.¹³⁸

II. Method of instruction used by James Steele

MacKaye in his series of lectures: The Scientific Basis of Aesthetics.

1. MacKaye first explained the Delsarte philosophy of expression before applying it to the uses of the human body. In the lectures themselves the philosophy is greatly simplified and some parts even omitted. For example, with the exception of the inferences derived from the term, "Divine Method," no reference to the trinity of the God-head was made. This whole concept of the "triune universe" was mentioned mainly in relation to its practical application in the art of expression.

2. By aid of questions presented by his listeners, MacKaye could review and emphasize the most obscure and difficult points to be grasped.

3. The explanation of the theory was accompanied with demonstrations of the many attitudes. Charts and diagrams were utilized as additional teaching aids.

4. MacKaye's system of lecturing presented an organized grouping of the agents of expression. First, each agent, eyes, torso, legs, hands, etc., was considered separately,

¹³⁸ Claude Shaver, "The Delsarte System of Expression as Seen Through the Notes of Steele MacKaye," Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation of the University of Wisconsin, 1937, p. 113.

but was finally related and interwoven with the expression of the body as a whole.

5. Training the student in Aesthetic Gymnastics was a most important feature of MacKaye's teaching. This training was explained by demonstration rather than words.

A presentation of the facts surrounding the contributions of MacKaye and Delsarte to gymnastics has been accounted for in the earlier portion of this chapter. ¹³⁹

6. One may assume that the series of lectures, The Scientific Basis of Aesthetics, presented a fairly complete picture of the Delsarte system, since MacKaye stated in the lecture, A Glimpse of Delsarte's Scientific System of Dramatic Expression. "To give a just and complete exposition of Delsarte's system, I ought to dwell for a long time upon his scientific basis of aesthetics in art" ¹⁴⁰

The following articles contain both critical commentaries from a variety of newspaper articles, along with descriptions of MacKaye's appeal to members of his American audience. Within these commentaries, some definite clarifications should begin to emerge as to gradual changes of stress in the Delsartian theories since the days when MacKaye and Delsarte had worked and taught together. At the conclusion of these critical commentaries, it will be the

¹³⁹See pp. 29-32.

¹⁴⁰MacKaye, cited by Morris, loc. cit.

purpose of this study to point out pertinent conclusions that will have a direct bearing on the third and final chapter of this thesis.

Upon MacKaye's return to this country in 1871, and in the following years, most criticisms were highly favorable. The appearance of the young genius, and the philosophy which he expounded, created a rather astounding reaction. E. P. Whipple in the Boston Transcript remarks: "We do not believe that a lecture on the scientific basis of the dramatic art, so rich and valuable in the fruits of the ripest study and skill as this one, has ever before been delivered."¹⁴¹

A critic of the Boston Advertiser writes: "The impression made by Mr. MacKaye was at once highly favorable. In person he is tall and slender, but lithe and well-proportioned. His face, set off by thick black hair, is distinguished by an arresting earnestness, thoughtfulness and purity of expression. His voice is deep and exceedingly resonant, sweet and flexible" ¹⁴²

The Harvard Advocate, commenting on MacKaye's lecture in Massachusetts Hall at Harvard College, states that, ". . . The lecture proceeded to a brief description of the 'scientific basis' of his art The lecture was listened to

¹⁴¹MacKaye, Epoch, I, op. cit., p. 151.

¹⁴²Ibid., pp. 151-52.

throughout with an interest it well deserved."¹⁴³ Continuing its praises, the article states that MacKaye's lecture brought home an interest in elocution to the minds of the audience, more forcibly than anything else could have done. MacKaye actually practices the art which Harvard talks so much about and, does so little.

In a letter written years afterwards by Joseph Clark, dramatist and poet, to Percy MacKaye, son of Steele MacKaye, a fine tribute was paid: ". . . From that April night of his lecture in Steinway Hall the name of Delsarte advanced quickly to be a synonym of art expression the country over."¹⁴⁴

The success of these lectures made it certain that Francois Delsarte would be well-received in America. Such success was largely the result of MacKaye's dynamic personality. "As a lecturer, Mr. MacKaye was brilliant. He could think and talk on his feet with all the fluency of an orator."¹⁴⁵

The impressions which MacKaye made upon so many of his audience may be illustrated by the reaction of Franklin Sargeant, who, at the time of MacKaye's lecture at the Boston School of Oratory, was a student there. He claims that the lectures were so condensed, profound and learned that he

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 155.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., p. 157.

¹⁴⁵"James Steele MacKaye," Werner's Voice Magazine, New York City, N.Y., 1879), XVI, No. 12, Dec., 1894, p. 458.

found great difficulty in fully comprehending. He did recognize the great thought and science of the content of these lectures.¹⁴⁶

Many years later Sargeant wrote to Percy MacKaye:

. . . I took rapid notes, filling my notebook, and when, at the close, Steele MacKaye left us, I found myself left alone in the hall, meditating on the profundity of his discourse, overflowing for me with revelations. As I walked in the dean's private office, I asked: 'Prof. Monroe, what is this?' And I shall never forget the patriarchal old man . . . as he looked up at me and said, 'My boy, this is the key to the universe!'¹⁴⁷

Sargeant further states:

The rationale of expression which I thereafter followed in my teachings at Harvard University, and subsequently in my position as dramatic instructor at the Madison Square Theatre was founded strictly upon those glimpses of profound truth, which I had obtained from the twelve lectures given by Steele MacKaye in the Boston School of Oratory.¹⁴⁸

On December 1, 1885, after a lapse of several years from the lecture tours, MacKaye did an extended tour of various cities in New York State. The Rochester Democrat reported: "Steele MacKaye, the foremost American expressionist of today said in his inspiring lecture: 'There are three ways of pantomiming. by permanent bearings of the body; by passing attitudes; and by gestures. Gestures are pantomimic verbs. They indicate doing or desire. Attitudes are adverbs

¹⁴⁶Morris, op. cit., p. 12.

¹⁴⁷MacKaye, Epoch, op. cit., 290.

¹⁴⁸Ibid.

modifying gestures. Bearings are adjectives qualifying the subject . . . "149

The Cornell Era of Dec. 4, 1885, wrote:

" . . . In his lecture here at Library Hall, December 11th, on the Philosophy of Expression, Mr. MacKaye will show the great laws underlying all art expression. As an actor of fascinating skill and power, he will illustrate his lecture by scenes from the great dramatists wherein he will do much to bring about a new interest in the literary work in the University, and also to lead the way for the formulation of a dramatic club among the students, which will help to correct the impression that our culture is being rapidly absorbed by larger technical interests . . . "150

The Buffalo Courier reported: " . . . 'Pantomime,' he said, 'is subject to laws definite and easily learned. All in us which constitutes the element of manner is pantomime in nature.' Illustrations were given showing how we form our judgment of men from acts which are wholly voluntary . . . Much stress was placed upon the repose of manners."151

The comments of the Utica Daily Press were:

No speaker could have held more the individual attention of his hearers. He said ' . . . As a means of expressing the beautiful, the body itself should be used, rather than devices invented by the caprices of man . . . The whole domain of expression is as important and unchangeable as the law of gravitation . . . The aim of all expression is impression. The

¹⁴⁹Ibid., II, p. 59.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁵¹Ibid., p. 39.

more we can understand of all psychological natures, the more effortless will become our mode of expression. Add soul enough to speech and we have a Dante, a Milton, a Shakespeare. Add soul enough to pantomime, and we have a Raphael . . . ' At the close Mr. MacKaye answered numerous questions from the audience written on slips of paper. His illustrations were simply perfection,¹⁵²

According to the Syracuse Standard, MacKaye lectured, afternoon and night, to the clergymen who were assembled in Plymouth Church, Syracuse. " . . . Steele MacKaye told the clergymen how to preach . . . 'Actor and preacher,' he said 'should so sink their personalities that there would only be the impression of the uttered words' . . ." ¹⁵³

Some further tributes to MacKaye's triumphant series of lectures throughout the following years are referred to in an earlier two-part article written for the Drama Magazine of Nov., 1911 and Feb., 1912. The Boston Transcript, March 22nd, 1871 leaves little doubt as to the initial impression made by the great man.

Mr. MacKaye's lecture last evening was in every respect a brilliant triumph. In spite of the severe storm, an audience composed of our most cultivated citizens filled the hall. The neatness and accuracy of Mr. MacKaye's statements, the grace and ease of his bearing, the exquisite beauty and fitness of his gesticulation--which justness, modesty and force were equally combined--the marvelous vividness and rapidity of his facial changes, made his auditors express their approval and delight in constant applause. We do not believe that a lecture on the

¹⁵²Ibid., pp. 59-60.

¹⁵³Ibid.

scientific basis of the dramatic art, so rich and valuable in the fruits of the ripest study and skill as this one, has ever before been delivered.¹⁵⁴

And in The New York World (February 18, 1872):

We gladly chronicle the success which has attended Mr. MacKaye's dramatic venture. In the light of his success, we shall perhaps be able to see more clearly what this young artist has accomplished. . . . Without professional sympathy or support of any kind, Mr. MacKaye has planned, and carried in to successful execution, a trial season of three months. During this time, he has in his own person united the varied and conflicting duties of manager, agent, capitalist, actor, author, and tutor. Notwithstanding this herculean burden, he has fought his way to recognition even from those who were at first his most bitter opponents.¹⁵⁵

Describing his work, Mr. F. F. Mackay, the veteran actor, himself a teacher of distinction, writes recently: "By the introduction of the Delsarte system of study . . . , MacKaye gave a new thought to the study of elocution in its application to dramatic art. His was a brilliant, inventive mind, in advance of his age."¹⁵⁶

And Mr. Augustus Thomas, the dramatist, thus:

Steele MacKaye was a master of the art of physical expression. No man of his day, or none that I know now, had or has a better knowledge of the purpose and effect of gesture, of facial expression, and of the eloquence of restraint. His knowledge of these was practical. He knew exactly what he wished before he directed it. He had the ability to make his wish understood, and he had the talent to do the thing he asked the actor to do.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴Percy MacKaye, "Steele MacKaye," loc. cit.

¹⁵⁵Ibid.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., p. 153.

¹⁵⁷Ibid.

The final article to be cited has a direct bearing on the concluding summary of this chapter, as it presents a rather complete idea of the total effect produced by the actor by the Delsartian Methods. Taken a few steps further, we shall note how James Steele MacKaye, a theatrical genius very much in, or slightly ahead of, his time, incorporated his knowledge of Delsarte with the theatrical trend of pictorial realism manifested during these years.

This is a final portion of an article from The Boston Advertiser, March 24th, 1871, cited previously in this chapter:

As a grand summarizing, Mr. MacKaye showed a number of 'chromatic scales' or 'gamuts' of facial expression, as he called them, which were so astonishing and impressive as to beggar all description. In exhibiting these gamuts, he stood before his spectators perfectly motionless, except in his countenance, and, starting from the normal expression, would make his face pass very slowly through a dozen grades of emotion to some predetermined phase, and thence he would descend, reversing the previous steps, to perfect repose. Thus, in one instance, he showed a chromatic state of feeling running through satisfaction, pleasure, tenderness and love to adoration, and, having retraced his steps, descended facially through dislike, disgust, envy and hate to fury. Again he exhibited, with ludicrous, but edifying vividness, the transitions from repose through jollity, silliness and prostration, to utter drunkenness; and made a most astonishing but painful spectacle of his fine face passing through all the grades of mental disturbance to insanity, and down all the stairs of mental weakness to utter idiocy. It would be hard to overestimate either the effort demanded for the performance of this exercise or that by which the necessary skill was originally attained. The impression produced upon the audience was at once very lively and very profound.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 147-48.

A few concluding statements concerning the preceeding material of this study will aid the reader in recognizing the Delsartian influences as they were evident in MacKaye's Spectatorium. To accomplish this, a brief summary is necessary, giving the most salient facts pertaining to this viewpoint.

It would seem that the 'Delsarte Science' varied little as it was taught by James Steele MacKaye and Francois Delsarte. Under closer scrutiny, however, there were gradual, but definite, shifts in certain areas of concentration when the system was introduced in the United States.

It has been stated that Francois Delsarte was, first of all, a singer. As a singer, he studied elocution. Upon losing his voice, he turned to the study of artistic expression and did extensive study of the human anatomy. He believed that there were a set of scientific laws underlying human expression, and, if these could be mastered, an artist would result. His pupils consisted of singers, actors, public speakers, clerics, i.e., all people requiring higher communicative skills. There seems to be no indication that any one aspect of artistic expression took precedence over another. The students were coached in all aspects of expression, no matter what their major occupation was. Delsarte's 'Cours' was never connected with the opera, theatre, conservatory, or seminary, though many students of the fore-mentioned attended his lectures. Also, there

is serious doubt as to whether or not Delsarte used gymnastics to any extreme degree, other than necessary for ease of bodily gestures. Though speech, pantomime, voice, etc., were worked on separately, at times, the ultimate desire of the master was the complete artist--skilled in every communicative skill.

Percy MacKaye presents evidence that his father was fascinated by the various poses the human body could assume--and this was long before Steele MacKaye met with the French master. MacKaye, however, never formed a scientific system and his later acquired knowledge was a result of Delsarte's training. Upon MacKaye's arrival in Paris, Delsarte and he were introduced, became fast friends, studied and taught together, all within a relatively short space of time. The evidence suggests that MacKaye learned Delsartian techniques rapidly, as a result of gymnastic exercises which he himself developed. Delsarte's reaction was so favorable that gymnastics began to be included as one of the aspects of the 'Cours'. Delsarte accepted MacKaye's individual contributions to the system, which, even at this early period, revealed some tendency to mere emphasis on the physical. Perhaps, as was stated, this was because the Roman Catholic doctrines--upon which Delsarte's theories were based--were rather alien to MacKaye; if not alien, perhaps just not as important.

It should be borne in mind that Steele MacKaye came to America intent upon preparing for the arrival of Delsarte, who desired to found a school in this country. After Delsarte's death, MacKaye was forced to continue expounding his master's theories, along with pursuing his own career. This career, though it began with acting, soon branched into writing, managing, producing, teaching, and inventing highly technical theatrical devices. Though he disliked scenery, costumes, etc., that were mere artificial embellishments, it will soon be noted that he was greatly responsible for scenic inventions far beyond those ever utilized before. For him, his inventions produced illusions very similar to nature, and this inclination of his was very much in keeping with the theatrical trend of the time--the pictorial theatre of romance and realism.

MacKaye's dramatic schools, where young aspirants of acting were trained in Delsartian techniques, were usually in connection with a theatre. Whenever MacKaye managed a theatre, dramatic coaching was done in collaboration with it, so that the participating actors were highly skilled in the techniques MacKaye believed in. As the theatrical trends from the spectacle, to the melodrama, to the drama of intimate realism evolved, three names are constantly referred to. These are: David Belasco, Henry Irving, and James Steele MacKaye. A. Nicholas Varoak, in the following chapter of this study, refers to the above-mentioned trends

as a 'cycle,' of which these men formed an important triumvirate. The photographic ideal, which crept into aesthetic favor, was very much in keeping with the pictorial aspects of Delsarte's system. Dialogue came to be unimportant. It might be stated that MacKaye did not relinquish Delsarte's system in his last years, but, rather, exploited those aspects of it that were basic to the theatrical tastes of the time.

Referring back to the lectures compiled by Miss Morris, noticeable changes of stress begin to occur. MacKaye does explain the Delsarte philosophy in great detail in the course of these lectures. Elocution is also incorporated into the lecture material, particularly when the participating members of the audience were people very much concerned with this skill. It seems relevant, however, that the last recorded lectures reveal MacKaye performing demonstrations of facial expression totally removed from the great dramatic scenes previously used for these purposes. Dialogue seems already to be receding into the background. Perhaps this was the Delsarte theory carried to its logical end. After all, external manifestations of human emotion were one of the essential concerns of Delsarte, though these manifestations were based upon 'scientific laws' which originated in the Holy Trinity.

Following Delsartian theories from their origin in France to their introduction in America, it is possible to

trace a number of influences. Some of these influences were total misconceptions, having nothing whatever to do with the original contribution. The outstanding influences derived from Delsarte's life-work, it seems, are to be found in the American Theatre trends of the late nineteenth century, just before the advent of the silent motion picture.

The Spectatorium represents the general trend of the pictorial theatre of realism and romance better than any other example, as it included every theatrical device known at the time to create a pictorial illusion of reality. This pictorial reality, the result of ingenious mechanical devices and the actor's body, was to have reached the pinnacle of realization with MacKaye's monumental project.

CHAPTER III

THE SPECTATORIUM: A CULMINATION OF THE MACKAYE-DELSARTE COLLABORATION

A. Nicholas Vardac elaborates upon MacKaye's contributions to the theatrical trends prevalent at the time. Regarding his inventions, he states:

To these mechanical devices, all aimed at the enhancement of the pictorial aspects of production, must be added his sponsorship of a system of acting which arose out of and exploited a purely visual appeal. This system, in which he had gathered his first training from M. Delarte in Paris and which has come to be known by this name, owed much of its favor in America to Steele MacKaye. At the New Lyceum Academy, the Delsarte method, depending upon the pictorial values of body positions and attitudes, became the foundation for his course in acting. Such a pictorial approach to acting was thoroughly in accord with the theatrical trends of the times and was fully exploited upon the stage by MacKaye himself.¹⁵⁹

Each of the men making up the great triumvirate in the nineteenth-century pictorial theatre of realism and romance represents a particular stage in the culminating phase of this cycle. The contributions of Steele MacKaye were terminated by his death just a year before the vitascope (first version of the motion picture) was exhibited. Irving's popularity (one of the well-known producers of

¹⁵⁹A. Nicholas Vardac. Stage to Screen: Theatrical Method from Garrick to Griffith. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), p. 135.

the triumvirate) reached its peak simultaneously with the arrival of the film, and subsequently lessened as he embarked on a tour of the provinces. Belasco came closest to the photographic ideal--not prior to the cinema, but after its popularity had been established. The reason for this was that Belasco's work, while moving in the same plane as the motion picture, did not run directly against its competition. Never abandoning his reproductional techniques (he once transported a section of a Child's Restaurant to the stage of a theatre), he strove to outrival the screen by an exploitation of certain specific areas. These areas were: (1) acting in the restrained, naturalistic style with graphic business, and (2) settings of interiors, reproductionally lighted, architecturally constructed, and filled with a multitude of realistic, authentic, and recognizable details. In these areas Belasco suffered little interference from the early motion picture. Chronologically speaking, MacKaye came first, then Irving, and Belasco last. However, Steele MacKaye's contribution to the realistic development of romantic staging was, in his short career, of a larger scale (the Spectatorium) than that of his colleagues.¹⁶⁰

James Steele MacKaye was in no way a revolutionist; that is, his contributions to scenic effects and acting

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

dared no transgression against the pictorial mode of theatre then in vogue. It was in 1875 that he adapted Rose Michel from the French of Ernest Blum for A. M. Palmer. It was produced on November 23 of that year at the Union Square Theatre with scenery by R. Marston. Nym Crinkle (Andrew C. Wheeler) wrote that MacKaye told his "story from first to last . . . by action."¹⁶¹ Evidently this adaptation had something in common with the silent film, for another reviewer, writing that "pantomime and picture are unquestionably the prime essentials of good drama," proclaimed that to test the excellence of this play "it is only necessary to take the language out."¹⁶² This provides an excellent definition of pre-cinema theatrical standards. Dialogue was unimportant, as "each incident lived in the memory as a vivid picture."¹⁶³ The photographic analogy present in this production was not lost. "So cunningly have the playwright and the manager set this fable in vital tints, so deftly have they fashioned its living parts, that every phase of it is a photograph itself, either of character or of situation."¹⁶⁴ This

¹⁶¹Ibid. Vardac cites a review of Rose Michel by Nym Crinkle dated Jan. 18, 1876, pp. 135-36.

¹⁶²Ibid. Vardac cites a review of Rose Michel which appeared in the New York Graphic.

¹⁶³Ibid.

¹⁶⁴Ibid.

pictorial kind of playwriting was supported by equally realistic stage views which "are rather built than painted,"¹⁶⁵ and "which leave nothing whatever to be added for the imaginative eyes."¹⁶⁶

A. Nicholas Vardac states that MacKaye's own plays, in keeping with nineteenth century theatrical traditions, were melodramatic, dependent upon external effects, and replete with the cinematic conceptions of this dramatic form. Oftentimes, as in the film, such plays found successive productions under fresh titles while the spectacular effects which sponsored the original venture remained the same. Through the Dark, first produced at the Fifth Avenue Theatre, New York, on March 10, 1879, was revived as A Noble Rogue at the Chicago Opera House, July 3, 1888, and as Money Mad at the Standard Theatre, New York, April 7, 1890. The plot naturally, was "very much on the dime-novel order,"¹⁶⁷ but audiences came to see the pictures which were both sensational and realistic. A great model of the Clark Street drawbridge was mechanically reproduced on the stage for the Chicago opening. Dramatic conflict arose from the physical aspects of this setting. At the moment that the villain of the piece, Hack Murray,

¹⁶⁵New York Times, Nov. 24, 1875.

¹⁶⁶Ibid. Review of Rose Michel dated Nov. 24, 1875.

¹⁶⁷New York Dramatic Mirror, April 12, 1890.

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pursuing the hero's father, overtakes him by sleight at the foot of the bridge, "the bridge swings open for a vessel to pass and prevents the son from going to his father's assistance and the latter is overpowered and thrown into the river."¹⁶⁸

When the show moved to New York as Money Mad, Nym Crinkle wrote praisingly:

Nothing in all the important sensations of English melodrama can compare, in structural audacity and pictorial effectiveness, with this bridge scene, as MacKaye now presents it. The very idea of swinging a causeway fifty feet long across the whole stage for the passage of a lake propeller at least sixty feet long, will cause a success of wonderment.¹⁶⁹

In Boston, "a smoking, snerting tugboat"¹⁷⁰ followed the steamer. At the San Francisco Grand Opera House, to heighten suspense and climax during the attempted murder, the steamer became 112 feet long and a tank of real water was utilized for the drowning. The steamer, as in the other productions, was rolled up in the fashion of a panorama, and bridge was swung out over the audience.¹⁷¹ As the steamer passed slowly through the night across the prescenum opening, "a realistic illusion of soft cabin lights, ship's gongs and marine whistles sounding . . .

¹⁶⁸Vardac, op. cit., p. 136. Cites from a review of Money Mad dated Dec. 25, 1888.

¹⁶⁹New York World, April 8, 1890.

¹⁷⁰Boston Transcript, Sept. 30, 1890.

¹⁷¹Vardac, op. cit., p. 137.

electrified the audience, above whose heads . . . the cries of the hero . . . rang out through the auditorium, as he shouted frantically to the play-characters on the stage."¹⁷²

Delsartian extremism began to be evidenced. Dialogue itself had little significance. The plot hinged entirely upon the situation and the reproductional, mechanical aspects of the setting. In fact, the photographic realism of the entire scene nearly broke the aesthetic distance, for the cries of Wilten Lackaye to the bridgekeeper, who refused to close the draw, and the curses, grunts, and pleadings of the figures fighting in the dark became¹⁷³ almost too real to be pleasant."¹⁷⁴ While the motion picture, endowed with a greater aesthetic distance, might carry this sort of sensational realism to a higher level, the stage had apparently reached its limit with this particular production.¹⁷⁵

Steele MacKaye's numerous melodrama productions all possess the cinematic qualities characteristic of the period.¹⁷⁶ That he was in the foreground of the presessions racing

¹⁷²MacKaye, Epoch, II, p. 242.

¹⁷³Vardac, loc. cit.

¹⁷⁴New York Sun, April 8, 1890.

¹⁷⁵Vardac, loc. cit.

¹⁷⁶Ibid.

toward the photographic ideal can scarcely stand dispute. Anarchy; or Paul Kauvar, written by MacKaye for production in Buffalo on May 30, 1887, and in New York at the Standard Theatre on December 24, 1887, was called a superb realisation upon the stage of one of the grandest eras in human history,"¹⁷⁷ and according to Nym Crinkle, surpassed the efforts of even Henry Irving: "Paul Kauvar is a play of action, action, action . . . You are asked only to look and vibrate.--So with Mr. Henry Irving's productions . . . But this is the point: Mr. Steele MacKaye has outreached with pictorial art all our importers."¹⁷⁸ The play, undoubtedly, did "not belong to the order of dramatic compositions that depends mainly upon dialogue for success," but like the motion picture, "its vital elements are action, incident and situation."¹⁷⁹ These concepts of playwriting were supported by realistic and spectacular stage pictures which could "speak to the heart as no words of poet, historian or dramatist could speak."¹⁸⁰ Nym Crinkle, holding that as a stage artificer MacKaye had no equal, described the vision effect at the end of the first act where the hero dreams of his beloved, Diane, at the guillotine as "electrical":¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷Rober G. Ingersoll, cited by MacKaye, Epoch, op. cit., p. 51.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., p. 158.

¹⁷⁹New York Dramatic Mirror, Dec. 31, 1887.

¹⁸⁰Boston Herald, Dec. 11, 1888.

¹⁸¹Vardac, op. cit., p. 138.

I have never seen a theatric picture whose subject was so terrible, whose action--as the heroine mounts the scaffold in her grey dress and falls into the horrible arms of the executioner--was so quick a combination of life and illusion. Had it been done by Mr. Henry Irving, this dream scene would have been recognized as an unparagoned triumph of realism. But nothing that Mr. Irving has attempted in this country at all approaches it in artistic ensemble, in pictorial effect, or in mechanical execution.¹⁸²

None of the gruesome details were spared and it is small wonder that Diane fainted into the arms of the executioner who, while she mounts the steps leading to the platform of death, "takes from the bloody knife the dripping head of the last victim."¹⁸³ Referring to this tableaux, the contemporary press proclaimed, in terms which indicate its clear relationship to the film, that the production's "most skillful invention is a silent picture."¹⁸⁴ This spectacular scene bears a close kinship to one of the earliest topical-episode films, the Beheading of Mary Stuart, made in 1895. Motion tableaux, silent pictures, were used throughout Paul Kauvar to picturize its significant and climatic moments. Two others, The Conquest of Evil and Liberty, were added several weeks after its New York opening to counterbalance Anarchy.¹⁸⁵ It has, indeed, been noted that

¹⁸²Ibid., citing MacKaye, Epoch, loc. cit.

¹⁸³Philadelphia Times, Jan. 6, 1889.

¹⁸⁴New York Star, Jan. 2, 1888.

¹⁸⁵Vardac, loc. cit.

Steele MacKaye, with this production, "presented . . . a vital sequence of 'living pictures' in motion, more than a generation before the advent of the modern vitagraph."¹⁸⁶

These tableaux derived much of their vitality and realism from the groupings, vocal patterns, and movements of the mob. Percy MacKaye, Steele MacKaye's son, had made the following claim:

Paul Kauvar was the first American play (perhaps the first modern play) technically builded [sic] upon mass effects in preduction, visual and aural; that is, the large ensemble situations, the half-distinguishable dialogue of the mob (which appears in no printed or manuscript text), the tempo and flux of its rhythmic sound-surges were structurally . . . intrinsic parts of the plot and motivation, not introduced for mere whirling clamour and spectacle, but to clarify and impersonate dramatic significances of the play's national folk-theme.¹⁸⁷

And so, in the fasion described by early screen critic Vachel Lindsay as the "Motion Picture of Crowd Splendor," MacKaye had developed a dynamic, personalized mob which, as a unit, became the most significant single dramatis persona in these scenes. The pattern of aural-visual relationships presents an interesting analogy to modern methods in the sound film.¹⁸⁸ The connection here between Steele MacKaye and D. W. Griffith becomes "more obvious in subsequent examinations of the early motion picutre, for,

¹⁸⁶MacKaye, Epoch, op. cit., p. 153.

¹⁸⁷Ibid., pp. 145-46.

¹⁸⁸Vardac, op. cit., p. 139.

like the great mobs of Judith of Bethulia or Intolerance, the mob of Paul Kauvar became a "hideous rabble of maniacal men and women, inflamed with passion and liquor and led by Carrac--a notorious and bloodthirsty monster. Human realism cannot go much further than it has gone in this mob."¹⁸⁹

John Carboy of the New York Despatch wrote: "The demoniac madness; the wild fury, the bloodthirsty desperation and the brutality of a Parisian revolutionary mob, have never before had so truthful and impressive a showing upon the stage in this country."¹⁹⁰ Even David Belasco conceded that this amazing mob scene "was the first genuine, thrilling mob we ever had."¹⁹¹

And, as with the earliest of motion pictures, the incidental music "was suited to the action, as Paul Kauvar's entrance was heralded by a certain figure, and the onslaught of the mob was accompanied by the anarchic theme."¹⁹² MacKaye's success, then, with this play, as, indeed, throughout his career, came from the exploitation of external productional values: scenery, mass movements, spectacular action, tableaux, visions, all on a reproductional level and thoroughly integrated by music. His

¹⁸⁹New York Sun, Dec. 25, 1887.

¹⁹⁰New York Despatch, Jan. 8, 1888.

¹⁹¹MacKaye, op. cit., pp. 146-47.

¹⁹²Buffalo Express, May 31, 1887.

approach to theatre was almost entirely in terms of motion pictures and, ironically enough, the performance of Paul Kauvar in London at the Crown Theatre, Peckham, April 9, 1900, was followed by "an exhibition of Edisonograph war pictures."¹⁹³

There is scarcely need to elaborate further upon MacKaye's techniques in the staging of melodrama. His intentions, achievements, and contributions are quite clear. His conception of theatre was largely visual, and his concern with language small. He exploited the optical qualities of theatrical presentation through reproductional scenery, thrilling action-tableaux, spectacular sequences, and gripping visions. His stagings often achieved a three-dimensional, architectural quality sometimes surpassing those of Henry Irving but always moving toward the photographic ideal.¹⁹⁴

MacKaye's achievement as writer and producer of melodrama forms the least significant part of his contributions to the American theatre. His cinematic leanings and accomplishments were even greater in the other two branches of his theatrical activity.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³Vardac, op. cit., p. 140. Quotation cited by Vardac from a review of Paul Kauvar.

¹⁹⁴Vardac, loc. cit.

¹⁹⁵Ibid.

In the theatre of melodrama Steele MacKaye conformed to the pattern set by his colleagues and predecessors. Like Belasco and Irving, he continued and enlarged upon the basic traditions of the nineteenth-century theatre of realism and romance. But between the lines of the preceding section is to be found an occasional suggestion of dissatisfaction with existing staging facilities. "Steele MacKaye, more so than his colleagues, was an inventor of staging devices. This genius was focused upon carrying the legitimate stage into the orbit of the motion picture and marked his greatest contribution to the theatre of the nineteenth century."¹⁹⁶

The Madison Square Theatre was remodeled in 1879 under the direction of Steele MacKaye and opened on February 4, 1880, with his own play, Hazel Kirke. According to MacKaye, all changes were governed by the desire "to focus attention, time, and money on the creative art of the stage picture itself."¹⁹⁷ He recognized the value of musical accompaniment to support the external nature of his staging technique and at the same time felt the need for eliminating the distraction of an orchestra playing directly in front of the stage picture. A platform was built above and behind the prescenum opening and here the

¹⁹⁶Ibid.

¹⁹⁷MacKaye, Epoch, I, op. cit., p. 410. Interview cited by N. Vardac.

musicians sat, invisible to the audience, palying their musical illustrations for the stage picture below. In addition to this, an elevator stage was installed.¹⁹⁸ This was designed to enable MacKaye "to sort and distribute . . . scenery upon three floors, instead of huddling it upon one; to control the waits between acts, avoiding tedious delays; and to produce scenic effects impossible upon any other stage."¹⁹⁹ Sensing the dislike of metropolitan audiences for the conventional staging methods and not yet willing to sacrifice speed and variety in his scenic pictures, he was able through the use of the elevator stage, to fulfill the pictorial requirements of this romantic theatre with solid, built-out, and practicable settings. This was one of MacKaye's earlier attempts to reduce the then established theatrical conventions.²⁰⁰

Further confirmation of his pictorial conception of theatre and of his belief that certain forms of drama might dispose of dialogue altogether was given in 1892, when MacKaye applied for a patent for a "Silent Unfolding Announcer Appliance for Theatres," stating that its purpose was "to provide means by which the performance or scene which is being exhibited may be automatically

¹⁹⁸Vardac, op. cit., p. 141.

¹⁹⁹MacKaye, Epoch, op. cit., p. 323.

²⁰⁰Vardac, loc. cit.

explained or interpreted by a silent unfolding announcer, without subjecting the audience to the annoyance incident to an oral explanation."²⁰¹ This and other devices were carried out and demonstrated in connection with his Spectatorium and his Scenitorium.

It would seem that the visual aspects of Delsarte's system had, by this time, assumed major importance, speech being considered not only of slight importance, but actually annoying and distracting. One wonders whether the great master, himself, would have approved of these extremes, even from his favorite pupil.

At about this same time MacKaye application for patents for an "Illumiscope," "Colourator," and so forth, developing further techniques for heightening the scenic illusion. These were intended

. . . to provide means for the improvement of scenic illumination upon the stage and the increase of realism in scenic effects. To this end I have devised improved appliances for imitating the shades and tints of light which color the landscape, from the darkness of night, through dawn, sunrise, early morning, noon, afternoon, evening, sunset, twilight, moonlight into the darkness of midnight again; these appliances permitting the imitation of the tints of the hours to be produced completely, or in part, as desired, and facilitating the passage and blending of the various tints each into the other so as to illustrate the slow progress of the hours throughout the whole day. They also permit the imitation of clouds moving through the sky, and of cloud shadows moving over land and water.²⁰²

²⁰¹MacKaye, Epoch, II, op. cit., addenda, lxxxii.

²⁰²Ibid., lxxxiv.

By means of this series of devices the color and lighting effects connected with the progress of time and other natural phenomena were projected and controlled by a fixed mechanical operation.

In the same year he claimed a patent for a "Sliding Stage." The purpose of this was similar to that of the elevator stage, but the technique called for horizontal rather than vertical movement. Specifically, he sought

. . . to provide a sliding or movable [moveable] stage and means for handling or moving and controlling the movements of stages or stage equipments and scenery with facility so as to adapt such devices to be easily moved forward or back, sidewise or in an oblique direction across or in front of a proscenium opening, and to readily change the direction of motion so as to produce the desired result in shifting set or other scenes or stage appliances or equipments.²⁰³

MacKaye's inventive strength was directed entirely toward increasing the physical facilities of the stage for pictorial illusion.

Next came the "Floating Stage," similar to the sliding stage but with much greater flexibility in the choice of direction or kind of movement. Here MacKaye aimed at providing

. . . an improved floating stage which is susceptible of a to and fro or rotary movement and may be propelled forward and back or in a curvilinear direction upon an artificial lake, tank or other body of water and sustained when desired in a fixed position in respect to other objects or other stages of the same

²⁰³Ibid., xci.

kind arranged in a proximity thereto, so that scenery, paintings or other objects or persons placed on the stages may be exhibited to an audience through the usual prescenum opening of a theatre or other structure adapted for the exhibition of spectacular, dramatic, or other performances.²⁰⁴

While various types of moveable stage were all calculated to provide a rapid and easy shifting of architecturally real scenery, his "Luxauleater" enhanced the spectacular appeal of such shifts by eliminating the ordinary curtain and providing in its place a curtain of light. This was devised to intercept "all sight of anything that may be placed or moved in the space at the rear of the prescenum opening or arch."²⁰⁵ With centrally controlled electric lighting, this curtain of light could be manipulated for cinematic dissolve effects, or fadeouts and fade-ins, thus providing much more subtle and realistic transformation effects than were possible with the conventional wing-and-border system.²⁰⁶

His "Cloud-Creator" or "Nebulator," a device for the projection of moving clouds, seems closely related to the motion picture. Here he provided "means for creating clouds or cloud shadows so as to produce the effect of clouds or cloud shadows moving upon or over landscape or sky foundation or other scenic arrangement, for the

²⁰⁴Ibid., xciv.

²⁰⁵Ibid., lxxiv.

²⁰⁶Vardac, op. cit., p. 142.

improvement of realism in land and water scenic effects."²⁰⁷ To these many machines for the reproduction of natural phenomena and the presentation and control of a number of architecturally real settings was added the "Prescenum-Adjuster." It was calculated to provide a greater flexibility in the pictorial arrangement of the stage. Changes from panoramic views to close-ups, from a gigantic cathedral set to an intimate fireside scene, could be handled instantaneously with any one of his mechanical stages plus this automatic adjustment of the size of the picture-frame opening. To accomplish this MacKaye devised "improved means for enlarging and contracting the prescenum opening at will, so that without a moment's delay and almost imperceptibly to the audience, except as to the result, and during the performance or exhibition, the opening may be enlarged or contracted in conformity with the requirements of the occasion."²⁰⁸ In this way MacKaye could control the type of stage picture offered, in the fashion of the motion picture with its long or medium shot, its panoramic or tracking shot.

The inventions of MacKaye all aimed at realizing the most perfect of visual productions, just as the Delsarte System carried to its extreme would do for acting. In his

²⁰⁷MacKaye, Epoch, op. cit., lxxvii.

²⁰⁸Ibid. xcvi.

presentation of the role of Paul Kauvar it was noted that he expressed everything by an

. . . ingenious system of physical symbols which conclude to be a demonstration of the theory invented by M. Delsarte, of whom Mr. MacKaye was at one time the apostle. He acts by a kind of algebra so to speak It is only fair to say that he gets there just the same, and with an accuracy that fully bears out the simile His acting, in addition to these intelligible strokes, is further distinguished by a profusion of graceful but meaningless gesture and action, very much like a writing master's flourishes.²⁰⁹

Carried to its logical conclusion, such a system would have resulted, as would his ever-all productional approach, in the complete elimination of dialogue. "Drama then would have become a series of visual symbols, pictures envisioned by the scenic artist and created by the stage mechanic and by the body of the actor. Theatrical invention plus the rigid application of the system of Delsarte brought the theatre of the nineteenth century to the very threshold of the silent film."²¹⁰

In 1886, MacKaye's pictorial proclivities brought him into an association with Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. His reputation as stage artificer had reached William Cody, who engaged him to stage a series of mammoth pictures illustrating the struggle of the growth and expansion of America. This cycle, named by MacKaye The Drama of Civilization, became the first of a new type of drama for America,

²⁰⁹Boston Courier, Dec. 16, 1888.

²¹⁰Vardac, loc. cit.

a dramatic form which has developed into one of the significant expressions of the motion picture, and which has been called by Percy MacKaye the "Masque of American Life."²¹¹

Many phases in the historical spectacle of the rise of America have since been reproduced. In The Drama of Civilization, the theme was the same as that exploited by the motion-picture epic of the 1920's, The Covered Wagon, MacKaye's scenario was completed in October and the production opened at the Madison Square Garden on November 27, 1886. Some idea of the magnitude of this romanticized reproduction of the growth of a nation and of the care and expense which were involved has been provided by Louis Cooke.²¹²

It was necessary to cut through solid walls, building temporary housings or lofts on the roof, to carry ropes and blocks, to handle the heavy set pieces and move the panoramas in order to produce some of the storm and atmospheric effects. Trenches had to be dug across 27th Street to connect with the steam plant in the old Stevens carshops. This steam was used to supply batteries of four six-foot exhaust fans, which operated one of the most effective cyclones that has ever been staged.

Preparatory to this, in the autumn before snowfall, men had been sent into the forest to gather up tons of fallen leaves and small shrubbery, sufficient to last through the winter. Two or three wagon loads were used at each performance, by throwing them in front of the great drafts, created by the fans which forced air through funnels that could be turned in any direction . . . The rear of the fans, and the rush of air turned upon the camps of miners and troopers, lifted the tents from their fastenings,

²¹¹Ibid., pp. 144-45.

²¹²Ibid., p. 145.



causing the flags to snap in the gale. Then when the storm was at its fury height, the leaves would be turned loose, sweeping the arena with terrific force, lifting equestrians from their horses and creating other sad havoc . . . The light and cloud effects, the old Deadwood stage-coach striking a snag in the ravine and going to pieces, while the six mules escaped on a dead run, with only the forward wheels, dragging the driver by the reins--all this never failed to bring a tremendous final curtain call . . . The production included also one of the most realistic prairie fires ever presented, when we saw a stampede of real horses, cattle, buffalo, elk and deer, dashing across the plains.²¹³

The panoramic background for this spectacular epic, painted by Matt Morgan, was "a picture half a mile long and fifty feet high."²¹⁴ The result, comparable to the James Cruze epic, The Covered Wagon, was not unlike a Thomas Ince western motion picture:

First Scene--"The Primeval Forest," with bear and antelope. Here the aboriginal Indians appeared, two tribes joining in a friendly dance, broken in upon by a hostile band, a fight ensuing, with antique weapons . . . Second scene--a Prairie Encampment, with the old emigrant schooners and a realistic prairie fire. A Virginia Reel on horseback . . . Third scene--a Cattle Ranch, where the cowboys' fun is interrupted by an Indian attack, which is beaten off at last by Buffalo Bill and party of rescue . . . Fourth scene--a Mining Camp in the Rocky Mountains. Here rides the "pony express" and the Deadwood Coach is robbed, though the road agents are captured.²¹⁵

And finally, as climax, the camp was carried off by the cyclone. The pictorial qualities of this production, tremendous and painstaking as it must have been, can

²¹³Newark Evening Star, July 1, 1915.

²¹⁴MacKaye, Epoch, II, p. 83.

²¹⁵Ibid., p. 85.

hardly be denied. It would be difficult to imagine any other development that would have surpassed this project, yet A. N. Vardac states that MacKaye's Spectatorium caused the Drama of Civilization to fade into obscurity.

Of the plan itself Anton Seidl said, in 1892: "In the art of poetic spectacle this project far exceeds Baireuth [sic] as Baireuth exceeded the drama of Wagner's predecessors." And during the production of Caliban in 1916, when I [Percy MacKaye] showed some of these designs to Joseph Urban, "Why!" he exclaimed, "in Germany we have not yet developed anything so comprehensive in theatrical invention."²¹⁶

In the Spectatorium, indeed, was forecast a creative future for the theatre, the aesthetic values of which were purely visual.

Here there was to be not pictorial illusion of reality but reality itself, the creation of pictures-in-the-round-in motion, that is, three-dimensional motion pictures.²¹⁷

The aesthetic values striven for in the Spectatorium, a three-dimensional and purely visual illusion, could be said to have been the culminating phase of Francois Delsarte's influential system of artistic expression.

As described by the American painter, Robert Reid, who was present at the Chicago Chamber of Commerce banquet in 1892 when MacKaye's ideas were presented, the Spectatorium was "in essence the birth of the modern art of the

²¹⁶Percy MacKaye, "The Theatre of Ten Thousand," Theatre Arts Magazine, VII (April, 1923), 119.

²¹⁷Vardac, op. cit., p. 146.

motion picture--only it was a picture-of-motion done in the round, to the life,--an actual 'movie,' not a photograph."²¹⁸ All the arts and all the sciences were evoked by MacKaye in a manifesto for "an entirely new species of building, invented and devised for a new order of entertainment entitled a spectatorie . . . to present the facts of history with graphic force."²¹⁹

All of the inventions discussed in the previous pages were incorporated into the Spectatorium on a colossal scale.

There were to be twenty-five telescope stages, all of which were to be furnished with scenery of an entirely new species devised by myself [MacKaye]. The frame of the stage pictures was 150 by 70 feet, and the full range of the vision of the public, at the horizon of the picture, would have been over 400 feet. It would have required over six miles of railroad track for these stages to move upon, and their aggregated weight would have been over 1,200 tons . . . the machinery of the building . . . would have made each change within forty seconds . . . An entirely new system of lighting was to be used in connection with these stages, the aim being to arrive at as close a reproduction of the subtle light effects of nature as modern mechanism made possible . . .

There was also the cyclone machinery, the running of which would have required over 400 horse power, and the immense current-and-wave-makers, requiring an equal amount of force . . . This mechanism would have been capable of producing, in the most realistic manner, all sorts of land-and-water-scape effects, and every kind of weather, as well as natural illuminating effects . . .

²¹⁸MacKaye, Epoch, op. cit., p. 331.

²¹⁹Chicago Times, Aug. 24, 1892.

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Among the light realisms were all the optical phenomena produced by the passage of time from night, through the early dawn, the rising of the sun, followed by all the tints of the twilight, and the gradual appearance of the constellations, accurately depicted as they exist in the southern hemisphere--the stars softly stealing through the evening sky into the night, and thence through deepest darkness to the day again; also the falling stars and meteors, the milky way, the aurora borealis, the real lightning, and the real rainbow . . . Among the weather effects, were to be the clear day through all the subtle modulations of the approaching storm with real haze and fog and rain. In addition, the real wind effect of almost every degree of force, with the movement of real waves of water, presenting thus all the phases of the atmosphere produced by different degrees of temperature and humidity, combined with the many capricious aspects of the sea . . . The purpose of this mechanism was to bring into the realm of art as perfect a reproduction of nature as possible.²²⁰

The entire stage apparatus was to be powered by electricity and the performance controlled from beginning to end by one man from a centrally located overhead booth. The building was in the process of construction, intended to be the main feature of the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, when the financial "panic of '93" occurred. After hundreds of thousands of dollars had been invested and the building already in its final stages, for want of a few thousands more the entire project was discarded and, soon after, the building torn down, not one public performance having been given.²²¹

²²⁰MacKaye, Epoch, op. cit., pp. 346-47.

²²¹Vardac, op. cit., p. 147.

One might ask: What were the artistic and social aims of this Theatre of the Ten Thousand, designed to produce as its first offering The World Finder, a Spectatorio by Steele MacKaye on the theme of Columbus, for which Dvorak was composing the interpretive music (afterward partly incorporated in his New World Symphony). Added to these endeavors, Victor Herbert was directing the choral music, Leon Espinosa the school of dance and pantomime, and such citizens as George M. Pullman and Lyman J. Gage were associated as business directors.

Steele MacKaye best answers the question in his own words, written in the Spring of 1893:

To create a form of fine art which shall draw the multitude sufficiently to insure the financial success essential to sustain its worthy production is an aim which has seemed to me worth the devotion of a lifetime. By a practical experience of over twenty years, I have been taught that the tendency of our modern public taste is toward realism rather than idealism. This for two excellent reasons:

First, the character of the occupations which absorb the majority of our people renders them more prone to appreciate the common facts of practical life than the uncommon illuminations which sublimates that life in the eyes of genius. Second, that total lack of thoroughness in artistic training, consequent upon this, which characterizes most of our professional performers makes it far more difficult for a manager artistically to realize the ideals of the poet and the philosopher, than successfully to present the sensational realism of the stage carpenter, the costumer and the scene painter. In consequence, there has been of late years a much greater development of the sensational than of the spiritual side of theatric art. Since, then, the realistic is that element in art most thoroughly comprehensible to the common people, I have labored, first, to increase and improve the

element of realism in stage art, and then so to combine that with the spiritual and poetic as to make the fascinating force of realism a means of popularizing idealism.

After many years of anxious endeavor, I finally developed and combined a number of mechanical systems, which in their ensemble constitute an entirely new form of theatric construction, and to this intended tabernacle of the fine arts I gave the name of Spectatorium. I also devised a new order of theatric art, the aim of which was to unite the mystic with the realistic for the moving presentation of the themes of human history, in such wise as to illumine the ordinary minds to the ideal value of the ideal. To this new art of the theatre, involving a structural harmony of pantomime, music and spectacle, I gave the name of Spectatorio.²²

The Spectatorium was to have been located on the Lake Shore, at the north entrance of the Columbian Exposition grounds, in Jackson Park, a suburb of Chicago. At the time, it was the largest structure ever erected for the alliance of the arts in the domain of drama and music. Its frontage was 500 feet, depth nearly 400 feet, altitude at the dome 270 feet. Together with its studios and power house, it occupied an area of 600 feet. In architecture it was a combination of the Spanish Renaissance and Romanesque. Its audience chamber was equipped to accommodate about 10,000 people; its scenic department, in area, was over 100,000 square feet.²²³

²²²"Steele MacKaye," The Drama Magazine, Feb., 1912, op. cit., 169-70.

²²³"The Theatre of Ten Thousand," Theatre Arts Magazine, op. cit., 121-22.

Though the entire structure seems to be entirely a mechanistic achievement, thereby being scientifically rather than artistically oriented, MacKaye makes it perfectly clear that the mechanics of the Spectatorium were only a means to an end.

The aim of its vast mechnaaims is to create the means for a harmonious blending of nature and art, hitherto unachieved, to illustrate the noblest dramatic conflicts of history. Its conception indeed is on such a scale that as a permanent institution it can never, its supporters believe, be degraded to the presentation of the petty or the vulgar. Therefore its management hope to commence a series of productions, to follow one another in the years to come, which shall by progression reach the loftiest heights of artistic achievement, and make Chicago as famous as an art center as it is fast becoming the focus of business ability.

To this end a free, but strictly professional, school of acting, music, dancing and scenic fine art has been started, with the hope that, as the means of the management may increase, it shall be equipped with every facility which invention and the ablest leaders may insure for the culture of the theatre's art in America.²²⁴

Though the building was razed before a single performance could have been given, large-scale models had been completed. The World Finder, re-creating the trip of Columbus into the New World, intended for the inaugural performance of the Spectatorium, had been staged. An audience of newsmen at the preview of this projected production

²²⁴"Steele MacKaye," The Drama Magazine, loc. cit.

. . . saw the clear white lights of innumerable stars shining out of such a sky as only the Mediterranean reflects, and recognized familiar constellations . . . saw red beams of light streaming from the little church, in which Columbus knelt, while Padre Juan Perez said mass . . . lights in the windows behind which the crew of the Santa Maria were singing tipsy songs . . . saw the declining moon fade out . . . church and cottages disappear in the "darkest hour before dawn"; saw the stars gradually grow pale-- outlines of church and cottages reappear dimly--a faint glow on the eastern horizon deepen imperceptibly, till [they] beheld what has been sung since Homer's day--the grey dawn stealing over land and sea--the despair of painters and the delight of poets. This was the last touch . . . "That is dawn itself . . . The picture is as true as any I have witnessed, before sunrise, standing on the high bank of the Hudson and gazing seaward. Mr. MacKaye, your art and your science together have solved the problem of absolute realism:

As the glow of the rising sun deepened, a land breeze sprang up, filled the sails of the Santa Maria, covered the calm sea with ripples, rustling the leaves of trees on the shore. Not only did their shadows move with the swaying of the branches, but they shortened as the sun rose higher, just as shadows do in nature. The little fleet stands out to sea. Palos recedes. The beacon is passed. The Santa Maria, her brave captain and the quaking crew are tossed on the mysterious sea . . . It is rather too heavy a tax on one's imagination to determine the probable effects upon an audience of 10,000 when the completed spectacle is presented with all the accessories of finished actors and the music of great masters.²²⁵

The zenith of the pictorial theatre of the nineteenth century had at last been reached. The century-old quest for the photographic ideal was at the point of being realized upon the stage, in or by 1893, just two years prior to its demonstration upon the screen.²²⁶ Percy

²²⁵Vardac, op. cit., p. 148.

²²⁶Ibid.

MacKaye refers to the comments of F. R. Green, assistant to Steele MacKaye, concerning the construction of the miniature:

When you think of the mechanical difficulties--the proscenium opening in a horizontal semi-circle--a curtain of light, invented by him, in order to change scenes--a tank of water, with tracks under water--cables to move the truck-cars (which held the scenery), operated by windlasses--and everything in relief, built up to cast real shadows from an electric sun--and consider that all was demonstrated to be practical: it is clear to see that there never was a theatre like his spectatorium, before or since, nor any approach to it.²²⁷

It appears that everything had been directed toward the cinematic illusion. "The curtain of light was used for dissolve effects and to accelerate scene changes. Scenery was prearranged upon twenty-five stages which could be controlled from the central booth. Lighting effects could be integrated from the same control."²²⁸

Size and scale were, obviously, tremendous. The ships of Columbus, for example, were equipped to carry "50-feet masts."²²⁹ Such magnitude had its effect upon acting which, of necessity, would become entirely pictorial. Actors "neither spoke, as in dram; nor sang, as in opera," but were "reduced, in that respect, to pantomimists."²³⁰ A special school had to be set up for these actors,

²²⁷MacKaye, Epoch, op. cit., p. 323.

²²⁸Vardac, op. cit., p. 149.

²²⁹New York Daily News, March 13, 1893.

²³⁰MacKaye, Epoch, op. cit., p. 345.

essentially "a pantomimic school, educating the student to understand and develop his natural resources of expression in physical action." And it was specifically stated that "elocution will not be taught."²³¹ Music, too, was utilized to cement the episodic pattern of this epic-dramatic form and enhance its pictorial values. MacKaye envisioned the same kind of thing as that of the early screen epics, Intolerance, Ben Hur, and so forth. Thus, while the \$1, 250, 000 reputedly invested in the unfinished project was a loss, the aesthetic and historical value of the attempt must be recorded as the creation, before the arrival of motion-picture apparatus, of a motion picture in the life.²³²

Despite the financial collapse of the Spectatorium [resulting from the financial panic of 1893], Mackaye managed to secure a backing of \$50,000 in the following year to carry out the original plan on a somewhat smaller scale. An old theatre was reconstructed at 130 Michigan Avenue, Chicago, and a modified version of what the great Spectatorium might have been was launched. The Scenitorium, as it was called, seated only eight hundred and boasted a prescenum opening of only sixty by twenty feet. Nevertheless, it was reported that the pictures approached²³³ "so

²³¹Ibid., p. 353.

²³²Vardac, loc. cit.

²³³Ibid., p. 150.



closely to perfect realism as to challenge nature herself."²³⁴
 The same scenario, The World Finder, was staged.²³⁵

The smaller-scale presentation of the scenes originally laid out for the Spectatorium was still in advance of contemporary pictorial staging. Electricity, too, was fully exploited for naturalistic lighting values, and it was conceded that "Mr. MacKaye is the first artistic scientist who has been able so to control electric lighting that he can give to stage views all the verisimilitude of night and day as perfectly and imperceptibly as if it were the very method of nature."²³⁶ The two completed achievements of Steele MacKaye in the staging of the spectacle "mark a peak in the pictorial theatre of the realistic-romantic movement of the Nineteenth century."²³⁷

Certainly nothing short of the great Griffith screen spectacle would have surpassed MacKaye's Spectatorium vision for The World Finder. That the dream of Steele MacKaye was to be consummated by the apparatus of the motion picture is not a coincidence. Both had come in response to a similar "social tension," aesthetic preference, call it whatever you will.²³⁸

MacKaye attained the pinnacle of his expression just as the cinema was about to appear. The motion picture soon picked up his work where it had been dropped by his

²³⁴Chicago Times, Feb. 6, 1894.

²³⁵Vardac, loc. cit.

²³⁶Chicago Inter-Ocean, Feb. 6, 1894.

²³⁷Vardac, loc. cit.

²³⁸Ibid.



early death and, exploiting the aims as well as certain specific techniques of MacKaye's method, carried out original premise of this pictorial theatre to its proper perfection.²³⁹ In 1927, A. F. Victor of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers wrote to Percy MacKaye,

Many of the methods we employ nowadays in motion picture making were originated by your father for use in his Spectatorium. Whether his ideas were remembered and put to use later on, or whether they were rediscovered, it is difficult to state without a certain amount of investigation . . . It is especially interesting to note that the means employed by Steele MacKaye for the reproduction of atmospheric phenomena, and which were patented by him in 1893, are identical with those now in common practice . . . The cloud-producing scheme is an example of such priority of conception . . . I find every indication that the thing which today has developed into the most powerful form of public entertainment was in his mind, and that he recognized the appeal of that form of entertainment . . . Even titles and subtitles had been recognized by him as an essential to proper presentation, and these did not arrive in the picture industry until after many years of exploitation of the pictures themselves.²⁴⁰

Steele MacKaye, the, in the brief span of his career, carried theatrical production from the artificiality of the two-dimensional pictorial conventions into the very realm of graphic authenticity and the staged silent motion picture.

Of the triumvirate of outstanding pictorial theatrical producers, Irving, Belasco, and MacKaye (the creation of

²³⁹Ibid., pp. 150-51.

²⁴⁰MacKaye, Epoch, I, op. cit., xx.

the most cinematic staging of the nineteenth century must be credited to the later). MacKaye, from his earliest connection with the theatre, had demonstrated a thorough agreement the pictorial mode of the era. Though his approach to theatre was altogether graphic, he sought to overcome the counterfeit conventional methods for handling the thrilling spectacular sequences of melodrama through the invention and introduction of a number of staging devices. Such machines as the sliding stage, the elevator stage, and the floating stage sought to eliminate two-dimensional scenery by providing means for the storage and rapid shifting of solid, three-dimensional scenery by providing means for the storage and rapid shifting of solid three-dimensional settings. His luxauleater, illumiscope, colourator, cloud-creator, or nebulator all strove to heighten the visual illusion through advanced usage of electric lighting. His silent unfolding announcer sought to eliminate dialogue, as his prescenum adjuster provided a method for controlling the size of the picture frame automatically to accomodate either a close-up, medium, or panoramic view.²⁴¹

This inventive genius in the physical setting of the play was coupled with the sponsorship of a system of acting which, if carried to the conclusion of its basic premise, would have eliminated the need for the vocal illusion, for dialogue,

²⁴¹Vardac, op. cit., pp. 249-50.

completely. The actor would have become utterly subservient to the demands of MacKaye's scientifically created stage picture, and theatrical production would have assumed the quality of a silent film. These various inventions, plus a severe version of the system of Delsarte, were combined in his *Spectatorium* (incomplete), 1893, and his *Sceniterium*, 1894. Here, with his many scientific devices, electrically harnessed, he succeeded, just two years before the arrival of cinema, in staging a centrally controlled "motion picture-in-the-round," thus demonstrating beyond any possible question that the aims of nineteenth-century popular theatre were identical with those of the moving pictures. Within the few years of his short career Steele MacKaye had envisioned and achieved on a restricted scale the pictorial stage production of The World Finder, surpassed only by such later spectacle filmings as Intolerance, The Birth of a Nation, Ben Hur, or The King of Kings.²⁴²

It is interesting to note that the references to Delsarte are far fewer in this chapter than they were in the preceding chapters of this study. This, perhaps, needs some explanation. Certainly, it is evident that the Delsartian influences were very much a part of MacKaye's theatrical knowledge and activity, right up to the time of his death. Why, then, aren't there continuing references to the man responsible for much of MacKaye's success? The reasons must now be elucidated.

Delsarte founded a system which he called the "Delsarte Science and Art of Artistic Expression." This system was taught to James Steele MacKaye, who, in turn, contributed his ramifications. These ramifications were

²⁴²Ibid., p. 250.

accepted by Delsarte and incorporated into the system. Had Delsarte lived to come to America and teach his system, perhaps his influences would have been of a different kind. What appears to have happened, is that MacKaye taught his master's theories as they had been basically set down. Naturally enough, he seems to have begun putting more stress on some aspects of the system, less on others. Perhaps this was done unintentionally and in good faith.

As the theatrical needs of the time became apparent to MacKaye, the Delsartian principles began to attain new meanings. A series of changes took place. Speech receded to an unimportant position. The visual became of the utmost importance. Emotion was expressed with the body alone. Together with these factors, the trend to pictorial-realism was strengthened and aided by exact imitations of nature through the use of ingenious theatrical devices. MacKaye's inventive skills were put to good use.

Delsarte's system had been assimilated and applied to the theatre of the time as Steele MacKaye saw fit. His genius had utilized the genius of another. Both artists were very much of their time--in some respects, ahead of it.

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