

Isadora Duncan and the Distinction of Dance

Ann Daly

In turn-of-the-century America, Edith Wharton wrote in her autobiography, “Only two kinds of dancing were familiar . . . waltzing in the ball-room and pirouetting on the stage.”¹ Wharton missed her earliest opportunity to see the pioneering modern dancer Isadora Duncan (1877-1927), in 1899, when a Boston philanthropist and Newport hostess featured the aspiring young dancer at a garden party:

“Isadora Duncan?” People repeated the unknown name, wondering why it had been used to bait Miss Mason’s invitation. . . . I hated pirouetting, and did not go to Miss Mason’s. Those who did smiled, and said they supposed their hostess had asked the young woman to dance out of charity—as I daresay she did. Nobody had ever seen anything like it; you couldn’t call it dancing, they said. No other Newport hostess engaged Miss Duncan, and her name vanished from everybody’s mind.²

No doubt, the young Duncan’s performances, sponsored by New York and Newport socialites, must have looked peculiar. She neither waltzed nor pirouetted. She did not kick up her legs; she manipulated no skirts; she rarely portrayed any specific character. In her more semantically polemical moments, Duncan rejected the label “dancer” altogether, in order to distinguish herself from the questionable antics of her colleagues.³ Instead, she set herself apart as an “artiste,” which is how she listed her occupation on the birth certificate for her

second child, Patrick Augustus Duncan, in 1910.⁴

In late-nineteenth century America, the popularity of the dancing girl grew alongside the development of theatrical syndicates, whose escapist entertainments reflected the increasing commercialism of the theatre. The typical scenario, recalled by *Modern Dance Magazine* staffer Louis C. Fraina went like this: “You enter. The audience, mostly male, eagerly eyes the stage. The air is heavy—the audience seems prepared for a ‘good time.’ They know about exactly what’s coming—the blaze of color, the stupendous efforts to amaze, pretty chorus girls and clever principals—legs, toes, arms, hips, breasts, eyes, hair, the whole melange of stage femininity.”⁵ Thus, the female body was a staple ingredient in the spectacle extravaganzas that dominated the stage. The dancers’ apparently nude legs (actually covered in “fleshings”) were just another part of the *mise-en-scène*, to be marvelled at along with the lavish costumes and incredible sets. (Ironically, it was the legs that were objectified, and the scenery that was mobilized.) By the turn of the century, the “dancer” was implicitly female, with little distinction between the trained ballerina, the entertaining skirt dancer, and the moonlighting factory-worker-cum-chorus-girl. She was constructed as a highly paid, empty-headed—and probably blonde—soubrette of ill repute. Subject to the whims of the novelty-hungry audiences through the theatre manager, she was hired and fired largely on the basis of her looks.

It is no surprise, then, that Duncan was flatly rejected in her early auditions in San Francisco. Her dancing, one manager commented, was more suitable for church than theatre.⁶ Such managers, with their fingers on the pulse of the public’s desires, were not interested in grace and art but in shapely legs, unveiled silhouettes, smiles, and availability. Audiences had clamored for the likes of Lola Montez, with her convulsing spider dance, and Little Egypt’s shimmying hootchy-cootchy, and “The Naked Lady” herself, Ada Isaacs Mencken, so named for her apparently nude ride strapped atop a “wild stallion” in *Mazeppa*. They flocked to see Lydia Thompson and her British Blondes, who transformed burlesque from its nineteenth-century emphasis on satire and parody into the twentieth century striptease.⁷

But by World War I, in large part due to Isadora Duncan,⁸ dance had been transformed from entertainment into “Culture,” at least in New York.⁹ Duncan reimagined the form and content of dance as an aesthetic object and convinced an audience of its legitimacy as a “high” art.¹⁰ She created a “taste” for dance, and, furthermore, made it a matter of “good taste.” Her style of dancing became so widespread that, by the 1910s, local dance teachers added it to their list of offerings, identified variably as “Natural dancing,” or “Classic dancing,” or “Aesthetic dancing.” For working class and immigrant girls and women, this style of dance literally added “class” to their lives, because it had become an emblem of Cultural refinement.

Duncan managed to accomplish what historian Lawrence W. Levine has

described as the “sacralization of culture.” By the end of the nineteenth century, Levine has shown, opera and the production of Shakespeare—arts that had enjoyed a status both popular and elite in this country—underwent a process by which they were re-conceived as unquestionably elite. Although symphonic music and the visual arts were never quite as popular, they, too, gained their Cultural legitimacy through a newly institutionalized hierarchy that established standards and elevated taste. This process of sacralization endowed these arts “with unique aesthetic and spiritual properties that rendered it inviolate, exclusive, and eternal. This was not the mere ephemera of the world of entertainment but something lasting, something permanent.”¹¹ Culture became synonymous with the European products of the symphonic hall, the opera house, the museum, and the library, now seen as veritable temples, “all of which, the American people were taught, must be approached with a disciplined, knowledgeable seriousness of purpose, and—most important of all—with a feeling of reverence.”¹²

How, in less than two decades, did Duncan gain this reverence for dance? By deconstructing and reconstructing it as a practice of high, white, western Culture for the privileged classes of northeastern cities. She used strategies of difference and exclusion, exploiting the conventional distinctions between high and low and appropriating the legitimacy of established European practices and discourses.

Taste, according to French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, is not disinterested; rather, it is rooted in social origin and in education. As an arbiter of taste, Culture is not just reflective, but also productive. That is to say, it is not just “the state of that which is cultivated,” but also “the process of cultivating.”¹³ This process of cultivating—which, similarly to Levine, Bourdieu calls “cultural consecration”—confers “on the objects, persons and situations it touches, a sort of ontological promotion akin to a transubstantiation.”¹⁴ By inscribing into perception and practice a “distinction” (difference that produces hierarchy) between the sacred sphere of legitimate, or high, Culture, and the mere vulgarity of entertainment, Cultural practice thus fulfills a social function, whether conscious or not, of legitimating social—and specifically class—difference. In this essay, I want to identify the strategies that Duncan employed in order to establish the distinction of dance and then consider their social implications. But first I will outline some larger contours of her early relationship with American Culture as a “classical” dancer.

Culture and Nature, Greeks and “Primitives”

Unable to find encouragement for her fledgling dance, Duncan fled her native San Francisco for Chicago, and then New York. In 1899, at the age of 22, she abandoned America altogether for Europe: first London, then Paris. The American press’s amused depiction of Duncan as a “Greek” dancer began in reports from Paris salon society in 1901 and peaked during her first trip to the land of Apollo and Dionysus in 1903. Her rhetorical dependence on classical precedents lasted from about 1901 to 1904,¹⁵ when her experiment with a Greek

boys choir, singing “authentic” Greek music for her performances, ended unsuccessfully. Although she would return to the Greeks later, in the 1910s, for different reasons, during this early period she was stressing the ancients’ discovery of beauty in Nature and of Nature in the human form. And, not inconsequently, Duncan’s Greek rhetoric ended up functioning as a novelty in an era of novelty-driven theatre and journalism. Just as Ruth St. Denis’s gimmick was the “exotic” and Loie Fuller’s was the “picturesque,” so Duncan’s was the “classical.”

For America in the several decades before and after the turn of the century, “Greece” (conceived more from the likes of John Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn” than anything archeological) was an idea about Cultural legitimacy. An animating Cultural fantasy since the Greek Revival in the early 1800s, Hellenist enthusiasm indicated the renewed, post-Civil War aspirations of a burgeoning nation, without its own pedigreed past, to flourish in all its aspects—scientific, industrial, political, social, and cultural. The renewal of the Olympic games in 1896 had sparked interest in the Greek ideal of the body, helping to reinforce Duncan’s insistence on its beauty and nobility. Greek games were held at colleges like Barnard and Berkeley, and outdoor Greek theatres, like the one at Berkeley, were built in cities large and small. In the wake of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition, whose organizers purposefully chose a neoclassical architectural style over an incipient American modernism, civic and commercial buildings across the country—the courthouse, the state capitol, the university, the commemorative statue, even the firehouse—were being built in the image of the great Greek temple, its soaring columns and monumentality a visual declaration of collective ambition. In the flush of its imminent world-class status, America—as well as Britain, Germany and France—envisioned itself as the true heir of the great Greek civilization, in all its political, economic and artistic glory.

When Duncan returned to America in August 1908, after ten years abroad, producer Charles Frohman’s press agents began spreading word of Duncan’s “celebrated classical dances” before she even reached shore.¹⁶ After several seasons of Indian incantations, Salome dances, and Loie Fuller look-alikes, the Greek dance was a welcome distraction. Despite Frohman’s efforts to sell her as a Greek dancer, however, the Criterion Theatre audiences were not responsive to such refined references. As a *Variety* reviewer explained:

To one whose vision is perhaps somewhat warped by too frequent attendance upon vaudeville performances and whose culture in classic Art is rather less than inconsiderable, Isadora Duncan’s attempt to monopolize a whole audience—and a \$2 audience at that—for an entire evening, has very much the complexion of Paul McAllister’s untoward experiment as a condensed “Hamlet” in vaudeville. . . .

Now comes along Miss Duncan with an immense success

in Europe as a recommendation and offers Broadway (as distinguished from East 125th Street) an entertainment the lofty pretension to Art of which is in about the same relation to the established standard of entertainment.

... It is a fairly safe venture that a goodly percentage of the Criterion's audience who lent their applause to the none too plentiful gaiety of the evening did so because they thought that it was the proper thing to do and not because they found real delight in Miss Duncan's performances.¹⁷

The theatre audiences, who were accustomed to even lighter entertainment than usual during the summer season, were suspicious of anything pretending to "Art." (And, yet, the *Variety* review makes clear the social pressure to recognize and acknowledge "Art.") Duncan had better luck with her northeastern out-of-town engagements, but when she returned to New York, she and Frohman cancelled their contract. She began, instead, a series of immensely successful engagements with Walter Damrosch's prestigious New York Symphony Orchestra.

Her appearances with Damrosch were in concert halls and opera houses, like the Metropolitan, with a considerably different audience and set of critics. The audience was upper class, predominantly female, and thirsty for "Art." The critics flattered Duncan with comparisons grand and indiscriminating: not only to Greek sculptures and vases, but also to Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and even to Wedgwood pottery. In order to describe Duncan, *New York Daily Tribune's* highly respected music critic, H. E. Krehbiel, invoked the British minister Charles Kingsley's fanciful description of Greek dancing, "in which every motion was a word, and rest as eloquent as motion; in which every attitude was a fresh motion for a sculptor of the purest school, and the highest physical activity was manifested, not, as in coarse pantomime, in fantastic bounds and unnatural distortions, but in perpetual, delicate modulations of a stately and self-sustained grace."¹⁸ Duncan performed excerpts from Gluck's *Iphigenia in Aulis*, portraying the Greek maidens as they played ball and knuckle-bones and spied the Greek fleet in the distance. Then she added *Iphigenia in Tauris* and *Orpheus* to her repertoire, strongly reinforcing her reputation as the "Greek" dancer. Duncan may not have intended to copy ancient Greek dances *per se*,¹⁹ but she did admit to imitating their gauzy, tunic-style clothing, and her audiences immediately recognized the reference.

Despite the identification of this "Natural" body with "nudity," Duncan never performed nude. Her Greek costume left her breasts free (early versions of the brassiere were not widely marketed as an alternative to the corset until the 1920s) and modestly covered her groin, eradicating any pubic hair, as did the ancient statuary. Duncan's audiences accepted the tunic as a sign of nudity; moreover, they accepted it as a sign of *classical* nudity, whose claim to the Natural guaranteed the moral and the noble. The warm glow of Duncan's stage lighting

helped to create that ideal image, since it softened the reality of bare flesh, as did pancake makeup later in her career.²⁰

In the eyes of these moneyed, educated, largely female Americans, Classical art had made the liberating connection between nudity and nobility that had been impossible within the Puritan tradition. As they saw it, the body, as depicted on the vases and in the statuary, was endowed with an ideal form both moral and beautiful. For women like Mrs. William K. Kavanaugh of St. Louis, who defended Duncan against a minister who had characterized the dancer as a Midway come-on, Duncan was “an exquisite figure on an old vase that we are allowed to admire with all propriety.”²¹ As Americans constructed it, the unquestioned authority of Greek art allowed even a woman to contemplate the naked body with a good conscience and at the same time to congratulate herself on possessing an elevated taste—an elevation not only moral but social as well.

In this way, Duncan, who believed that “Education of the young is the only way to bring taste and understanding to the working class,”²² was not so different from the self-described “merchants of culture, professional men and artists”²³ who started the Metropolitan Museum of Art. These robber-barons-cum-Culture-brokers sought to establish Culture from the top down, so that eventually even the uneducated manual laborer could gain enlightenment through the love of the “Beautiful.” For regardless of the country’s industrial and commercial prosperity, explained one Museum patron, it still needed to prove itself Culturally:

The wealth of a nation lies not in its material pursuits alone. In a new country like ours they are the first to occupy its people, but when the forests are cleared, the roads built, the mines opened, the land tilled, manufactories in operation, and habitations are built, unless the higher part of man’s nature is developed in the realm of art, whether useful, beautiful or romantic, like music and poetry, the nation relapses into barbarism.²⁴

Duncan, too, was concerned that the masses not sink back into “primitivism,” that is to say, Africanism, which functioned in her practice as the paradigm of that pre-civilized state of being she endeavored to elevate.

Unlike her experiences in Germany, France, and the Soviet Union, where she opened free schools for all kinds of children, Duncan never was able to put her egalitarian educational ideas into practice in America. It was not Duncan herself, but the Duncan-style dance schools that opened across the country in the wake of her appearances that forged contact between her ideas and the immigrant/working class.²⁵ For example, modern dancer Helen Tamiris’s father, a Russian Jewish immigrant, sent her to Duncan-style classes at the Henry Street Settlement in order to get her off the streets of the Lower East Side.²⁶ For decades, thousands

of women and young girls like Tamiris flocked to classes in Classic, Natural, or Aesthetic dancing, and, in this process, hoped to acquire “Culture.”

Strategies of Distinction

Bourdieu conceives of society as being organized into “fields,” each of which is a structured and structuring system of social relations with its own logic. Any field, including that of Culture, has its own economy, so to speak, in which capital—economic, social, educational, symbolic—must be accumulated in order to advance or dominate in that field. The strategies for accumulating such capital and for gaining legitimacy, or distinction, are regulated by the field itself. These predisposed strategies, a generative constellation of tacit, internalized, embodied principles and practices, are what Bourdieu calls a field’s *habitus*. These unwritten rules are learned not explicitly, but implicitly, through practice in the field. Although the general contours of the *habitus* are shared by each player in the field, each individual, having come from a different background and thus occupying a different position within the field, have a slightly different *habitus*.²⁷

Duncan internalized the *habitus* of the Cultural field early in her life, although much of her childhood was spent in poverty and on the outskirts of polite society. Duncan’s parents, Joseph Charles and Mary Dora Duncan, apparently divorced shortly after the birth of their fourth child, Angela Isadora.²⁸ Without support, the 30-year-old divorcee had to eke out a living for herself and her children by selling knitted goods and giving music lessons. Fleeing more expensive San Francisco, the Duncan clan crossed the Bay to Oakland, where they moved frequently from one rented room to the next. Perhaps because she was the youngest and thus would garner the most sympathy, little “Dora” was the one sent to charm the credit from the baker. Sometimes cold and hungry, the four young Duncans enjoyed a rather unsupervised childhood: Dora dropped out of school around age 12. Whenever a little money did come their way, they spent it profligately on treats and luxuries, as if in defiance of their actual economic circumstances.

The Duncan’s poverty was compounded by a considerable fall from social grace. Before the divorce, the Duncans had been a respected San Francisco family. Joseph C. Duncan was a poet, art connoisseur, and a cunning businessman. The suave and cultured man had been a lifelong poet and an accomplished journalist. Early on, he had published the poetry of Ina Coolbrith, an Oakland librarian familiar to young Dora who later would become poet laureate of California. For a time he had run an auction house, and then became an art dealer, traveling to Europe to purchase his goods. A private art collector and one of the first presidents of the San Francisco Art Association, he was a leading force in establishing the fine arts there. Unfortunately, art dealing was not consistently profitable, so he turned to real estate, back to journalism, and then on to banking. He founded both the Safe Deposit Company, of which he was primary stockholder, and the Pioneer Land and Loan Bank of Savings, of which he was

secretary and manager. But with a wildly erratic economy, the tapering off of the silver mines, and hence the failure or suspension of other, more established banks, Duncan himself ran into trouble. He attempted to keep his bank afloat through some shady dealings, but it collapsed, nonetheless, in October 1877. Accused of forgery, embezzlement, and grand larceny, Duncan ignominiously fled the charges but was eventually found. After four inconclusive trials, the charges finally were dismissed on a technicality, in January 1882.²⁹

Despite—or because of—the poverty and the social stigma of jail and divorce, the Duncans clung to their artistic aspirations. For Isadora, it substituted for formal schooling. “My real education,” she wrote in her autobiography, *My Life*, “came during the evenings when my mother played to us Beethoven, Schumann, Schubert, Mozart, Chopin or read aloud to us from Shakespeare, Shelley, Keats or Burns.”³⁰ Their living room functioned as a salon, where Mother played piano; Aunt Augusta, in shorts, recited Hamlet; and Isadora, of course, danced. On the wall hung a reproduction of Botticelli’s *Primavera*, which she later would transform into a dance.

The family’s last two years in California, however, were spent more comfortably, back in San Francisco. Joseph Duncan by then had collected a new family and a new fortune, with which he bought Mary, Dora and the four children a stately home called Castle Mansion. The clan’s private theatricals expanded into a barn theatre, run by brother Augustin, which developed into a brief tour down the California coast. For several years, the family enjoyed a better standard of living. They gained some reputation among the town’s better families for the dancing school run by Isadora and her older sister, Elizabeth. Accompanied by her mother, Elizabeth also had taught at exclusive girls schools, bringing the family to the edges of, but hardly inside, high society. But, then, Joseph Duncan lost his fortune, and Castle Mansion, as well as its occupants, fell again on harder times.

Duncan claimed—and I do believe her—that, even as a child, she knew she was destined for greatness. Without any educational, social, or economic capital, however, her acceptance into the domain of Culture was largely unlikely, especially since dancing itself held no currency in that realm. But Duncan learned at a young age about the intimacy between class and taste, between social and artistic prestige. Denied the illusion of meritocracy that inheres in a comfortable middle class upbringing, Duncan became a remarkable master of the signs and emblems of dominant taste, and she used that practical knowledge to gain distinction for her art. Duncan’s savvy for positioning her dancing *vis-à-vis* major social institutions or practices (alignment with science, for example, or opposition to ballet) was as brilliant a performance as her dancing.

With the nineteenth-century sacralization of culture, the arts had become implicated in class status. The Duncans, with Joseph at their head, established class status not just by virtue of his income but also by virtue of his publicly-demonstrated aesthetic mastery. When the Duncans, sans Joseph, lost

all their money and their social position, they endeavored to maintain and, later, to increase status through their refined Cultural sensibilities. Those evening salons functioned not merely as self-amusement but as the private performance of class. Duncan dealt with the considerable anxiety of her changing childhood fortunes by a flagrant lifelong disinterest in the management of money and thus a denial of its importance; she displaced the definition of class from money to art. If class brought Culture (as the nouveau-riche took great pains to demonstrate), then could not Culture bring class? Duncan, and the girls and women who would later flock to Duncan-style dance classes, believed so.

The usefulness of Bourdieu's scheme to an analysis of Duncan's elevation of dance as an American art form is its attention to the ways an artist constructs distinction/difference, in both practice and in the perception of that practice. Using Bourdieu's model, we can look at how Duncan made specific choices in pre-existing, intersecting fields: how she strategically engaged economic, social, intellectual, as well as Cultural institutions and practices.

Duncan's choices consistently aligned her dancing with upper-class, white, Euro-America. Dancing was considered cheap, so she associated herself with the great Greeks, who deemed the art noble, and she associated herself with upper class audiences, by carefully courting her patrons and selecting her performance venues. Dancing was considered mindless, so she invoked a pantheon of great minds, from Darwin to Whitman and Plato to Nietzsche, to prove otherwise. Dancing was considered feminine, and thus trivial, so she chose well her liaisons and mentors—men whose cultural or economic power accrued, by association, to her. Dancing was considered profane, so she elevated her own practice by contrasting it to that of "African primitives." The fundamental strategy of Duncan's project to gain Cultural legitimacy for dancing was one of exclusion. In order to reinvent the idea of the "dancer," that is to say, to make dancing (but, specifically, her kind of dancing) a matter of good taste, within the existing Cultural field, Duncan employed the dominant logic of difference along a number of axes, and used it to Construct distinction. Effectively, she elevated dancing from low to high, from sexual to spiritual, from black to white, from profane to sacred, from woman to goddess, from entertainment to art.

She accomplished this through a range of communicative means—kinaesthetic, visual, and verbal. In performance, she embedded references to the Greeks in her costuming, music, *mise-en-scène*, and movement vocabulary. In photographs, whose relative scarcity (considering her fame) evidences Duncan's great concern about the circulation of her image, clothed herself *à la grecque*, sometimes explicitly quoting Greek iconography in her prose. The visual was predominated by the verbal, with which she felt quite comfortable. Her father, after all, was a writer, and she had begun writing (a novel, a neighborhood newspaper, a journal) at a young age. Duncan's speeches, both off and on stage, increased as her career progressed. She preached (usually freedom) and pleaded (usually for money, for a school) like a bluestocking. She freely granted

newspaper interviews (and learned well how to meet their need for good copy), and wrote letters-to-the-editor as well. Program notes (blurbs from reviews; poems; dramaturgical notes on the Greek productions) supplemented her performances; booklets, such as the early and enduring manifesto, "Dance of the Future," and a short-lived magazine also functioned to establish and extend the legitimacy of her art.

Of particular interest is a booklet titled "Dionysion," published in 1914, presumably to accompany her performances. Printed on beautiful, raw-edged paper, it consists of nothing but a series of quotes, one per page or spread, plainly designed, in a simple but serious typeface. Auguste Rodin's and Eugene Carriere's eulogies to her are included, and her own paean to the dance of the future is sandwiched between Walt Whitman and Friedrich Nietzsche. Duncan's meditation on the Greek theater precedes Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Hellas," and there are passages on Isadora's school and pupils (for which she was then raising money) by poet Percy MacKaye and writer/editor Mary Fanton Roberts. Nothing less than the Bible is given the final word: "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing," a reference to Duncan's loss of three children. Thus Duncan wove herself into the center of a network of both Euro-American and local New York Cultural authorities. The appropriation is made complete by twin images that frame the text, a picture of a Greek statue on the front cover, and one of Duncan on the back, making clear the dancer's desire to be seen as a Greek goddess. This strategy helped to elevate her from the realm of the physical, with its emphasis on female body parts, to that of the aesthetic.

Except for a very early vaudeville turn in Chicago and the ill-fated season at Frohman's Criterion Theatre in 1908, Duncan refused to perform in theatrical venues. Rather, she positioned herself, both literally and symbolically, in high-priced opera houses and concert halls mostly in northeastern urban centers, allying herself with symphony orchestras such as Walter Damrosch's, whose cache was already established. In one of her boldest moves, she dared to appropriate the canon of great symphonic works, notably with Beethoven's Seventh Symphony in A Major. To some New York music critics, who had only recently won their own hard-won victory for the sacralization of absolute music, such an idea cried heresy. It was perhaps justifiable for her to use Chopin's *mazurkas* and *polonaises*, or Gluck's dance interludes, or even Wagner's dance music, but it was an indefensible breach of aesthetic convention to attempt any "interpretation" of the great concert and operatic works. Despite the immediate indignant furor by music critics, Duncan prevailed, and her dancing came to be identified with the names of Tchaikovsky, Schubert, and Liszt as well.

But before Duncan ever got to the point of public performance, she was cultivating—and being cultivated by—wealthy women, whose patronage was an important factor in the establishment of Culture at the turn of the century. Symphonies, art galleries, and, later, the little theatre movement, were largely spearheaded by these philanthropic women.³¹ Duncan's early drawing-room

performances in Chicago, New York, and Newport were sponsored by the likes of Mrs. A. M. Dodge and Mrs. Nicholas Beach, whose afternoon soirées attracted attention from the most well-known society reporters. Duncan's Delsarte-based performances resonated with the likes of Mrs. W. C. Whitney, Mrs. William Astor, and Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish, who had met twice weekly in Delsarte-style classes in a distant Newport summer, "to writhe, wriggle, bend and sway; to relax and decompose [and to] form spiral curves and make corkscrews of themselves."³² In her earliest New York performances, Duncan attracted the same female audience which had patronized Delsarte-based classes and performances, both of which often employed Greek imagery. Duncan's dancing, and the classical statue-posing of Genevieve Stebbins before her, presented women with a rare theatrical opportunity to identify with Woman as both the source and emblem of Art.

When, after a Newport lecture-demonstration of Duncan's version of Omar Khayám's then-fashionable *Rubáiyát*, Mrs. Astor herself "invited Miss Duncan to sit by her upon a divan and talked with her for twenty minutes upon the music and poetry of movement the young lecturer's future was settled as far as the Four Hundred are concerned."³³ Similarly, when Duncan later returned to New York, her reputation was based in no small measure on her reported associations with the cultural, intellectual, and social elite: "The Alma Tademas saw her dance, and so succumbed to her charm that she became thenceforth their protege and was made much of by London's exclusive aesthetic set. The 'smart' and the titled sets followed after. The Prince of Wales himself applauded her."³⁴ The imprimatur of elite patrons—kings and capitalists—gained Duncan an aura of economic leisure and social pedigree.

Social capital, Bourdieu explains, encompasses a number of culturally, economically, politically, and sexually useful personal relations. Besides overcoming the disadvantages of an impoverished background by cultivating the patronage of upper crust hostesses and royalty, Duncan also overcame the disadvantages of being a woman by associating herself—sexually, socially, artistically and intellectually—with well-placed men. Edward Gordon Craig, a brilliant theatre theorist and designer and father of her first child, reinforced her early aesthetic hunches (although, truth be told, he gained much more from the liaison than she did). Paris Singer, heir to the Singer sewing machine fortune and father of her second child, gave her economic freedom and entree into moneyed European society. Walter Damrosch's eager collaboration was especially important to Duncan's early artistic reputation in America. And, of course, Duncan was not shy about dropping names—Wagner, Rodin, Haeckel, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Darwin. I am not saying that Duncan consciously chose male associations because of their gender *per se*, but rather that, given the sexually divided social, cultural, and intellectual fields at that time, the almost exclusive dependence on men (aside from her early patronesses) was a logical—and

effective—means of increasing her capital.³⁵

Duncan's most successful strategy in sacralizing dance was "Greece," a symbolic matrix whose set of signifiers cut across the aesthetic, economic, intellectual, and social fields. It was embedded not only in her flowery prose, but also in her dancing—the stories, the costumes, the movement vocabulary—and the grand manner of her lifestyle (her clothing, as well as her widely publicized trips to Greece). By invoking the classical ideal, Duncan effectively displayed her education and refinement. The Hellenistic practices also presupposed a certain class of spectator: not the likes of the *Variety* reviewer who mocked the artistic pretension of "the celebrated classical dancer," but rather an educated viewer reared on classical literature and philosophy.

In the Greeks, Duncan constructed an origin for her "Natural" dancing, as opposed to ballet, which she described as physically, aesthetically and morally deforming. No doubt genuine in her stance, Duncan was, nevertheless, capitalizing on a pre-existing discourse. Even before Duncan ever trod the boards, cultural and intellectual leaders were interested in reclaiming dancing as something more than mere "amusement," which implied a lack of social import or, worse, moral degeneracy. Duncan galvanized discourses that had already been established by American and Continental intellectuals, who had begun to make quite serious inquiries into the nature and status of dancing. From the 1860s to the turn of the century, and especially around 1890, dancing became a legitimate topic of consideration in respected books, such as Mrs. Lilly Grove's *Dancing*, and in journals such as *The Popular Science Monthly*, *Eclectic Magazine*, *Lippincott's* and *Contemporary Review*.³⁶ Authors criticized the state of the art: acrobatic entertainment, ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay skirt dancing and the ballet, with its ever-shortening tutu. Although it was generally agreed that dancing was in serious decline, authors recounted its past glories and called for its "renaissance."

The Social Origins/Effects of Modern Dance

I have argued elsewhere that Isadora Duncan offered her American audiences a means of imagining themselves in the radical process of transformation.³⁷ For artists and intellectuals, she did embody in her dance practice a revolutionary ethos. "This solitary figure on the lonely stage suddenly confronts each of us with the secret of a primal desire invincibly inhering in the fibre of each," wrote the poet Shaemus O'Sheel, "a secret we had securely hidden beneath our conventional behaviors, and we yearn for a new and liberated order in which we may indeed dance."³⁸ It also needs to be said, however, that, for the upper class, she reproduced a seemingly a-political, disinterested Platonic "Beauty." And, later on, for her middle-class "audiences," who experienced Duncan mostly second-hand, in the press and through imitators, she represented taste and breeding. Without dismissing the very real subversive meaning of her dancing for some of her audience, we also must recognize that Duncan's project was no less about cultural legitimacy than it was about aesthetics. And that this aesthetic

practice was produced by and, in turn, continued to reproduce, social differences.

Duncan's idea and use of Greece was really about the aesthetic of a "Natural" body. It was not a willful flight from high culture, off to some pre-civilized utopia. Neither was it a Whitmanesque celebration of the common folk, despite her genuine love for the poet's earthy vision. Duncan emphasized the noble over the savage; her model, after all, was the Nike of Samothrace, not Pocahontas. This "Natural" body, the foundational trope from which she theorized both her aesthetic and social agenda, was the artistic transformation of Nature into Culture. It was artless artifice. And "Nature" was only "Nature" when it was thus ennobled³⁹; otherwise, it remained base primitivism: "People ask me, do you consider love making an art and I would answer that not only love but every part of life should be practiced as an art. For we are no longer in the state of the primitive savage, but the whole expression of our life must be created through culture and the transformation of intuition and instinct into art."⁴⁰ In other words, the "Natural" body is a "civilized" body. Duncan wanted to establish dance as "civilized," which she did, at least in part, by establishing its essential difference from the "primitive savage" she saw as manifesting itself in the African-rooted social dances of the early teens.

Despite its roots in the classical world (by way of modern European thinkers such as Winckelmann and Nietzsche), Duncan's "Natural" body paradoxically offered the paradigm for what she felt to be a uniquely new, uniquely American culture. Although Duncan's noble Hellenic associations failed to make much connection with the Criterion's working class audience, the link with Greek Culture found believers among the wealthy, educated class of white Americans who could afford tickets to see her at the opera house or concert hall—a class deeply invested in the establishment of a national Cultural identity.⁴¹ And despite whatever initial resistance the working class may have had to such highfalutin Hellenism, the imperative of upward mobility to revere "Art" later brought them to the altar of dance as well, if not as spectators (which assumes a certain *habitus*), then as students (which entrains *habitus*).

Duncan was specifically interested in appropriating the roots of *western* (white) Culture, with the Greeks. The Egyptians, she said, were origin of an-*other* (black) race.⁴² During her Argentinian tour of 1916, Duncan called her unfriendly audiences "niggers," asserting that they were simply not advanced enough to appreciate her Art.⁴³ As for ragtime and jazz, whose popularity provided her with fierce competition during her second set of American tours, she scornfully dismissed them on many an occasion as "this deplorable modern dancing, which has its roots in the ceremonies of African primitives."⁴⁴ Unlike some of her European contemporaries, Duncan found neither beauty nor inspiration in what she perceived as a vulgar practice lacking in all taste.

Many social leaders agreed with Duncan that this modern dancing that saturated the country from 1911 to 1915 was unbecomingly violent and spastic.⁴⁵ While many criticized what they saw as the seething sexuality of dances like the

black bottom or the fox trot, Duncan objected to them as vulgar on different grounds. In literal and metaphorical terms, the popularity of modern dancing, which she identified with “African primitivism,” threatened Duncan’s social vision of unity and harmony. She railed against the uncontrolled character—the presumed *chaos*—of ragtime and jazz, because it symbolically threatened the moral *order* of civilization, which was precisely that moral order engendered by Duncan’s first principle, the harmonious ideal of “Nature” that she had gleaned from the Greece of Winckelmann and Botticelli and from the monism of Ernst Haeckel. According to Haeckel, God inhered within the singular web of the cosmos.

After reading Haeckel, Duncan came to understand “Nature” as a comprehensive system whose inherent harmony she mapped onto her body. “Nature” signified order. “Nature” served as a comforting, orderly matrix for all the fiercely multiplying, often contrary, elements in the universe—a universe whose microscopic and extraterrestrial boundaries were expanding daily, through the rapidly paced discoveries of science. “I always put into my movements,” she wrote, “a little of that divine continuity which gives to all of Nature its beauty and life.”⁴⁶ The “Natural” body, which represented her ideal society, was one that moved harmoniously, as a single unit whose each minute part functioned interdependently. It embodied the basic wavelike patterns and principles of movement in “Nature.”

Although a large part of Duncan’s appeal was her seeming spontaneity (and she fed this illusion, that her dancing was improvised on stage), Duncan’s dancing was far from wild. It was, according to *Masses* editor Max Eastman, a perfect proportion of “art with nature, restraint with abandon.”⁴⁷ Although “spontaneous,” her movement style had a decided sense of flowing, unhurried gentility. Compared to what was described as the “spasms” or “paroxysms” of Africanist dances, she embodied a spontaneity tempered with the unspoken, unquestioned control that marked good breeding. This particular bodily hexis (to borrow Bourdieu’s term for embodied dispositions of belief)—ease borne of effortless control—was that of the upper class.⁴⁸

By constituting a “Natural” body as the basis for dance practice, Duncan effectively removed from it any vulgar requirement of *labor*, which would have smacked of the working class; instead, it could be imbued with an aura of the innate—of good taste, which is, by definition, effortless. Something that ballet, constituted as it was by its demanding technique, could not claim. Since the popular perception of the ballet dancer was collapsed into that of untrained chorus girls, its social position was associated with lower class women who turned to dancing as a means of making a living. Thus, even though ballet could claim the history of kings, it still required and connoted work.⁴⁹ On or off stage, Duncan always aligned herself with leisure, luxury, and ease—never with necessity. “When in doubt,” she often said, “always go to the best hotel.”⁵⁰

This is not to say, however, that Duncan was a calculating aristocrat. She was

hardly unsympathetic toward the American masses; in her late career, after encountering the Soviet experiment, she claimed them as her true audience. Inhering in Duncan's art was a curious tension between the desire to legitimize dance as an aesthetic object through a strategy of exclusion, and the desire to spread dance as a social practice through a strategy of inclusion. Part of her desired to see the whole world liberate itself through dancing. But, really, she only accepted the "masses" on her own terms: as those who could be "uplifted" through the experience of Culture and, thus, affirming through their uplift the class difference that is ostensibly being erased. When she lauded the abilities of the tenement-dwellers on the Lower East Side to appreciate her Art, she did so primarily as a means of shaming unresponsive millionaires into contributing money for her to start a school.

Thus, when Duncan was denouncing African primitivism, or invoking Nietzsche, or constructing herself as a Greek goddess, she was producing and reproducing the social divisions between high and low. By operating strategically within the structures of the upper class, she was developing an audience and thus a "taste" for her art that drew upon and reinforced its distinction from all others—blacks, immigrants, the poor, the uneducated, the middle class. Bourdieu calls this effective social exclusion "symbolic violence: a symbolic means of perpetuating social difference in an age when overt violence has become unacceptable."⁵¹

Approaching Dance as Social Practice

Founded, at least in part, as a rebellion against ballet, the genre of American modern dance has long been approached by dance historians as embodying a democratic ethos. If ballet was about the subservience of the self to a male, European, aristocratic tradition, then modern dance was about the discovery of the self through a female, American, democratic experiment. A Bourdieu-modeled analysis of Duncan's practice, which looks closely at the social and historical bases of that Cultural production, yields a different, more complex story.

In order to gain legitimacy for what would later become institutionalized as American modern dance, Duncan engaged strategies whose ideological sources and effects were at odds with the democratic reputation that modern dance has come to enjoy. In fact, modern dance in America was constructed from and for high Culture, that is to say, white, western, male Culture. And at the heart of this construction, silent and unacknowledged, is the Africanist presence against which Duncan established her art as acceptable to an upper-crust audience.⁵² At the heart of St. Denis's Orientalist practice, too, lay the "darkie," this one from the east, through whose negotiation of sexuality and spirituality she appealed to a specifically middle-class audience. In both cases, the Americanness of modern dance (one of our few indigenous genres of art) was established through the use of an Africanist body as "surrogate and enabler," to quote Toni Morrison. "Africanism is the vehicle," she has written, "by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but

licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny.”⁵³ And, I would add, Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self posited by Duncan knew itself as not primitive, but Cultured.

For the study of modern dance as social practice (rather than just aesthetic object), Bourdieu offers a theoretical and analytical framework which offers a plausible alternative to the two extremes of cultural interpretation: on the one hand, “rational-actor” subjectivism, and on the other hand, objective determinism. It offers us a way to see that Duncan was neither a “genius,” forging new practices out of thin air, nor a passive function of her cultural context. Yes, Duncan’s choices and strategies were delimited by the institutions and practices of her day, but they were choices, nonetheless. Bourdieu’s concept of the *habitus* yokes together internal choice and external conditions into a mutually conditional and—this is most important—generative dynamic. He posits the artist as occupying a relational, potentially changeable, position in an equally changeable field. Thus we can recognize the social structures and practices through which Duncan negotiated her art while also acknowledging her agency. And vice versa. We can recognize her agency and still credit the social structures which gave rise to that agency.

Such an approach to dance as social practice could push the field of American early modern dance scholarship past its focus on individual figures and their *oeuvres* and facilitate inquiry into some of the larger, under-investigated question, such as: Why was modern dance founded by women? Was it or was it not a subversive practice? What were the origins and effects of its bodily hexis in other fields? What was the nature of its patronage by colleges? How did it spread, geographically? What were the meanings of its Americana phase, in the 1930s? How and why was it institutionalized? By what means did ballet and modern dance struggle for predominance? Isadora Duncan’s own struggle for distinction is merely the beginning, rather than the end, of an inquiry into the cultural production of modern dance in America.

Notes

1. Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance* (New York and London, 1934), 321.
2. *Ibid.*
3. George Seldes, “What Love Meant to Isadora Duncan,” *The Mentor* (February 1930), 64.
4. Folder 64, Irma Duncan Collection of Isadora Duncan Materials, Dance Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York City, NY.
5. Louis C. Fraina, “Lydia Kyasht—Spirit of Beauty,” *The Modern Dance Magazine* (April 1914), 12.
6. Isadora Duncan, *My Life* (New York, 1927), 25.
7. See Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill, 1991).
8. Ruth St. Denis and, to a lesser extent, Loie Fuller and Maud Allan also pioneered modern

dance. Unlike Duncan, however, St. Denis often performed in vaudeville venues. Fuller and Allan spent most of their careers in Europe, as did Duncan, but had much less of an impact in America.

9. For the purpose of distinguishing between “culture” in the anthropological sense, and “Culture” as high art, which is the subject of this essay, I will capitalize the latter. In keeping with the tenets of a socio-historical analysis, I will also capitalize words (such as Beauty and Nature) as they were intentionally and meaningfully capitalized by Duncan and her contemporaries. Occasionally, I will place such words in quotation marks, as a way of marking the gaps in belief between Duncan’s day and our own.

10. Duncan’s style of dancing was used in American pageants, too. Duncan was good friends with pageantry movement leader Percy MacKaye; it was most likely out of personal friendship than admiration for pageantry (she disdained amateurs) that she agreed to a cameo appearance in his *Caliban*, in 1916. On pageantry, see David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, 1990); Naima Prevots, *American Pageantry: A Movement for Art & Democracy* (Ann Arbor, 1990); Dorothy J. Olsson, “Arcadian Idylls: Dances of Early Twentieth-Century American Pageantry,” Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1992.

11. Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, 1988), 132.

12. *Ibid.*, 146.

13. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Richard Nice, trans. (Cambridge, 1984), 11.

14. *Ibid.*, 6.

15. Duncan’s discursive strategies shifted through the years. Her time in America can be divided into roughly three periods. During her early tours, 1908-1911, her pastoral Greek imagery appealed to upper class spectators aspiring to a greatness on the scale of the Greek civilization. During the War years, she appealed to the pro-Allied spectators and their revived sense of patriotism, especially when she wrapped herself in the flag and danced, like Lady Liberty, to the Star Spangled Banner. During her last tour, 1922-1923, she insulted a rabidly xenophobic and anti-communist audience with her Soviet sympathies (even though her idea of communism was calling Walt Whitman the first Bolshevik). Afterward, when stripped of her citizenship, she seemed to compensate in her rhetoric, returning to Whitman and the Statue of Liberty.

16. This idea of translating Greek statuary into dance was hardly new. Back in 1890, for example, at about the same time that “living statues” became a popular pastime for women, *The San Francisco Examiner* ran an article (could Duncan have seen it?) on two rather sophisticated skirt dancers named Carmencita and Otero, who, “in her slow and sinuous movements, seems like a masterpiece of Phidias” (“Wriggling into Wealth. Two Dancing Daughters of Sunny Spain, Carmencita and Otero. The Ballet of the Future Will Have Little Use for Legs. They are Children of Nature, But Their Mother Seems to Have Taught Them How to Dance—They Could Give Delsarte Points on Making Your Body Talk—Poetry of Motion Personified,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 1890, Performing Arts Library and Museum, San Francisco, California).

17. Rush, “Isadora Duncan,” *Variety*, 2 August 1908, Isadora Duncan Clippings, Dance Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York City, NY.

18. H. E. Krehbiel, “Miss Duncan’s Dancing,” *New York Daily Tribune*, 7 November 1908, Isadora Duncan Clippings, Dance Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York City, NY.

19. Collections of Greek vases and plaster cast collections of the great statuary circulated in the new urban museums of the late nineteenth century. Even before seeing the British Museum, Duncan herself may have seen San Francisco’s brand new collection of Greek vases in the California Midwinter Exposition Memorial Museum, which opened in March 1895. In New York she may have seen the plaster casts at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

20. Based on the available indirect evidence, it appears that Duncan wore undergarments, as a rule: either a teddy-type leotard fastened to the outer tunic at the shoulders, or a brief pair of tights, depending on the costume (Mary Desti, *The Untold Story: The Life of Isadora Duncan 1921-1927* [New York, 1981; reprint 1929], 218-19; Maurice Dumesnil, *Amazing Journey: Isadora Duncan in South America* [New York, 1932], 154; Julia Levien, interview with author, New York City, NY, 10 July 1990).

21. “Isadora Duncan’s Dance Causes War in St. Louis,” *The Kansas City Post*, 5 November 1909, Isadora Duncan Clippings, Dance Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York City, NY.

22. Isadora Duncan, *The Art of the Dance*, Sheldon Cheney, ed. (New York, 1928), 118.

23. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Twenty-fifth Annual Report of the Trustees of the Association* (New York, 1895), 23.

24. *Ibid.*, 26.

25. “The agitated ripples that Isadora Duncan started have widened and divided until now there are many different schools of free dancing,” reported *The Woman Citizen* in 1926. “One of the most popular, whose appeal and influence is national, is the school of Florence Fleming Noyes.” She had

four schools in New York alone, and two summer camps in Cobalt, Connecticut (Mildred Adams, "The Rhythmic Way to Beauty," *The Woman Citizen* 11 [October 1926], 27).

26. Helen Tamiris, "Tamiris in Her Own Voice: Draft of an Autobiography," Daniel Nagrin, ed., *Studies in Dance History* 1, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 1989/90), 7.

27. On *habitus*, see *The Logic of Practice*, Richard Nice, ed. (Stanford, 1990), 52-79; *Distinction*, 169-225. On field, see *Logic*, 122-34. The first half of *Logic* provides a coherent description of Bourdieu's overall project. On the cultural field in particular, see *The Field of Cultural Production*, Randal Johnson, ed. and intro. (New York, 1993).

28. Because of the San Francisco earthquake and fire in 1906, in which city records were destroyed, there is no birth record available on Duncan. Her baptismal record at Old Saint Mary's Church, however, indicates that she was born Angela I. Duncan on May 26, 1877. The middle initial "I" is presumably for Isadora, shortened to "Dora" when she was a child. Although Fredrika Blair (*Isadora: Portrait of the Artist as a Woman* [New York, 1986]) identifies Mrs. Duncan as Mary Isadora, all other records (including Isadora's birth certificate) and biographies from primary sources refer to her as Mary Dora; however, as with her daughter, "Dora" may have been short for "Isadora."

29. See Harry Mulford, "Notes and Items Relating to Joseph Charles Duncan (ca. 1823-1898) Father of Isadora Duncan," Isadora Duncan Collection, Performing Arts Library and Museum, San Francisco, CA.

30. Duncan, *My Life*, 13.

31. See Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Women's Culture: Americana Philanthropy and Art, 1830-1930* (Chicago, 1991).

32. "A Craze for Delsarte," *New York World*, 16 August 1891, Richard Hovey Papers, Dartmouth College Library, Hanover, NH.

33. M. Grace Beckwith, "The Poetry of Motion: Miss Isadora Duncan and Her Remarkable Dance," *New England Home Magazine* 6, no. 6 (5 February 1899), 246. This report of Duncan's success in Newport in Summer 1899 conflicts with Edith Wharton's above. The class distinction implied by Duncan's choice of venue was not lost on an anonymous writer for *Broadway Magazine*, who mocked the pretentiousness of Duncan's elite associations. "Miss Duncan," he wrote, "holds forth at such ultra-fashionable places as the Waldorf-Astoria, Sherry's and Carnegie Lyceum. She spurns Broadway with a large, deep, thick spurn, that almost makes us ashamed of having anything to do with the thoroughfare." Captions for the accompanying photographs read: "How I love my friends, the Vanderbilts" and "Isn't Mrs. Higueppe kind to throw those flowers!" ("Isadora Duncan as the Only Real Society Pet," *Broadway Magazine* [June 1899], 143).

34. "American Dancing Girl the New Sensation in Paris: Isadora Duncan, Heroine of the Hotel Windsor Fire, Takes the French by Storm with Her Poetic Rendering of the 'Rubaiyat,'" *The World* (16 December 1900). Also: "The Greek dancing of Isidora [sic] Duncan has become a fashionable fad in Paris, and she has been invited to many of the drawing rooms of the great houses in the city. Miss Duncan's latest hit was scored at the residence of the Countess de Trobriand, when she danced to the rythm [sic] of Greek poetry recited by a venerable professor from the Sorbonne" ("Danced into Paris Society," *Evening Journal* [11 February 1901]). Her next triumph, in Germany, was amply covered as well. One report had Emperor Francis Joseph of Austria and Kaiser William of Germany fighting over her ("Struggle for a Dancer: Beautiful American Girl Rejects the Offer of an Emperor to Accept an Engagement in Berlin," *The Pittsburgh Post* [4 April 1903]). Her successes at Bayreuth and in Greece made similar headlines.

35. On the feminist appropriation of Bourdieu's work, see Toril Moi, "Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist Theory and Pierre Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture," *New Literary History* 22 (1991), 1017-49.

36. Mrs. Lilly Grove, *Dancing* (London, 1895). See Lee J. Vance, "The Evolution of Dancing," *The Popular Science Quarterly* 41 (October 1892), 739-56; J. S. Rowbotham, "Dancing as a Fine Art," *Eclectic Magazine* 52, no. 1 (July 1890), 16-23; Amelia E. Barr, "Characteristic Dances of the World," *Lippincott's* 27 (1881), 330-41; Herbert Spencer, "Professional Institutions. III—Dancer and Musician," *Contemporary Review* 68 (July 1895), 114-24.

37. See Ann Daly, "Dance History and Feminist Theory: Reconsidering Isadora Duncan and the Male Gaze," *Gender in Performance: The Presentation of Difference in the Performing Arts* (Hanover, 1992); "Done Into Dance: Isadora Duncan and America," Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1993.

38. Shamus O'Sheel, "Isadora Duncan, Priestess," *Poet Lore* 21 (1910), 481.

39. Although today "Nature" is set in opposition to "Culture," in Duncan's day the two were elided; the former was used as a justification for the latter by avant-garde artists.

40. Isadora Duncan, "Dancing in Relation to Religion and Love," *Theatre Arts Monthly* 11 (October 1927), 593.

41. The call for a cultural nationalism peaked in the Village during the war years, when artists, radicals, and self-proclaimed Young Intellectuals called for a nationalism that focused not on militarization, but on Culture. Art, they felt, should express American life. *Seven Arts* magazine was

founded in 1916 by utopians who believed that America could be regenerated—or, rather, invented—through the expression of art. Herbert Croly, founding editor of *The New Republic* in 1914, wrote about the need for national cultural renewal as early as 1909, with *The Promise of American Life*. And so did Randolph Bourne. “We shall not develop to the fullest as a nation,” wrote Mary Fanton Roberts in 1912, “without the enjoyment of these emotional arts, because no people can achieve all that the sensitive among them desire without expressing the hunger for beauty that is deep in their hearts. A nation must sing, must dance, must make its own music to realize its portion of the world’s power for beauty.” See Robert Henri, “The New York Exhibition of Independent Artists,” *The Craftsman* 18, no. 2 (May 1910), 160-72; Thomas Bender, *New York Intellectual: A History of the Intellectual Life in New York City, From 1750 to the Beginnings of Our Own Time* (New York, 1987); Arthur Frank Wertheim, *The New York Little Renaissance: Iconoclasm, Modernism, and Nationalism, 1908-1917* (New York, 1976); Leslie Fishbein, *Rebels in Bohemia: The Radicals of The Masses, 1911-1917* (Chapel Hill, 1982); Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (New York, 1914 [1909]); Randolph Bourne, “Our Cultural Humility,” *The History of a Literary Radical and Other Papers* (New York, 1956); Edward Abrahams, *The Lyrical Left: Randolph Bourne, Alfred Stieglitz, and the Origins of Cultural Radicalism in America* (Charlottesville, 1986); Mary Fanton Roberts, “The Dance of the People,” *The Craftsman* 22, no. 2 (May 1912), 196.

42. Isadora Duncan, *Art*, 92.

43. Maurice Dumesnil, *Amazing Journey*, 153.

44. Duncan, *Art*, 126.

45. Irene and Vernon Castle made their reputation by cleaning up Barbary Coast dances for their exclusive New York clientele.

46. Duncan, *Art*, 102-103.

47. Max Eastman, *Love and Revolution, My Journey through an Epic* (New York, 1964), 6.

48. “Practical belief is not a ‘state of mind,’ still less a kind of arbitrary adherence to a set of instituted dogmas and doctrines (‘beliefs’), but rather a state of the body” (Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 68). “Bodily hexis is political mythology realized, *em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking” (Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 69-70). See Bourdieu, *Logic*, 52-79; Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 169-225.

49. The sub-field of dance in the American cultural field shifted, with the tours of Anna Pavlova in 1910 and Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes in 1916 and 1917. As ballet took a foothold, and the display of technique came to displace Nature as the generally accepted basis of theatrical dancing, Duncan’s claim to naivete worked against her.

50. Allan Ross Macdougall, *Isadora: A Revolutionary in Art and Love* (New York, 1960), 222. Like many other tidbits of “documented” Duncan lore, this may be apocryphal. In this case, however, the aphorism rings very true.

51. See Bourdieu, *Logic*, 122-34.

52. See Jane Desmond, “Dancing Out the Difference: Cultural Imperialism and Ruth St. Denis’s *Radha* of 1906,” *Signs* 17, no. 1 (Autumn 1991), 28-49.

53. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, 1992), 51 and 52.