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Alys Bentley's Dance Impulse, Embodied Learning, and the Dancing Mind

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ABSTRACT

The work and writings of Alys Bentley (1869–1951), an influential educator of dance and music, has been overlooked in dance scholarship. This article seeks to place Bentley in the history of dance in the United States, particularly in the context of early twentieth-century "natural" or expressive movement forms and Dalcrozean eurhythmics. The essay examines Bentley's legacy as a dance educator, her theoretical writings on movement and music education, and her views on dance, technique, and practice as expressed in her work of experimental poetry, *The Dance of the Mind*.

KEYWORDS Alys Bentley, dance education, early modern dance, movement and music

Perhaps the most remarkable social phenomenon of recent years, and one so far only partially understood or explained, has been the growth of the modern dance movement. The popularity of Russian and oriental ballets, the vogue of the newer social dances of

the day, the Dalcroze movement in Europe, and the introduction of dancing as a study in public schools, are only a few of the many signs of the world's present devotion to dancing.

In New York a serious movement has been inaugurated to direct the dance impulse. Miss Alys E. Bentley may perhaps be called the head of this movement. Her aims and those of her co-workers are wholly admirable.

–Editor's Note, *Vanity Fair*¹

With these words, the editor of *Vanity Fair* in 1914 described the seemingly unprecedented attention to dance in the period and praised the work of Alys Eliza Bentley (1869–1951), educator in the fields of dance and music, “for many years a key figure in the New York dance world.”² (See Figure 1, p32. All figures appear at the end of the article.) Yet, while contemporary reviews applauded her work, only brief references to the work and teaching of this extraordinary figure exist in dance scholarship and no substantive attention has been paid to her writings.

This article aims to shed light on Bentley's dance teaching and to place her within the history of dance in the United States. Bentley was not a dance performer, nor was she affiliated with a higher education institution, and she worked mostly with children—all factors that might have contributed to the neglect of her work in dance scholarship. Janice Ross offers an account of the crucial impact Bentley's classes had on movement educator Margaret H'Doubler (1889–1982), who founded the first dance major in the United States at the University of Wisconsin in 1926.³ H'Doubler's dance teaching relied heavily on the input she had received from Bentley. Beyond this encounter, Bentley is rarely mentioned in dance scholarship. The theories of education developed by this figure, who so crucially influenced the early development of dance

in American academia, needs more careful study. Writing on music and movement, teaching from a private studio in New York, and running a summer school for movement and healthy-living enthusiasts, Bentley impacted the early twentieth-century dance and culture scene in a number of ways.

In what follows, I explain the context for pursuit of physical/mental well-being and expression in this period. Then, I examine Bentley's work primarily against the background of two strands in early twentieth-century approaches to movement: forms of "natural" or expressive dance and Dalcrozean eurhythmics. I next turn to the writings of some of Bentley's renowned students to offer insights into her approach to movement and demonstrate her legacy as a dance educator. I then explore how she included movement and embodied learning in her theories of music education as represented in her writings, which do not concern music education only but, I suggest, can also be seen as early examples of embodied education—attempts to engage the physical, cognitive, emotional, and imaginative aspects of the self in learning. Lastly, I show that Bentley extended her preoccupation with movement and practice into her work in the literary arts in her experimental book of poetry, *The Dance of the Mind* (1933).

The physical culture movement

Bentley's work intersected larger crosscurrents in approaches to movement and physical and mental health at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries in the United States. The period witnessed a flourishing of health movements, including a spread of spas and sanatoria, as well as vegetarianism and health-promoting diets. Modern sports and formal physical education grew in popularity.⁴ Physical culture exponents Bernarr Macfadden and Eugen Sandow founded popular magazines and journals devoted to physical well-being and

strength training, lectured widely, established institutes and communities, and offered advice on healthy diet, sleep, and dress.⁵ “Spiritual fitness” regimes and “psycho-physical” methods aimed at improving postural alignment and a harmonious connection between the mind and the body.⁶ Yoga found its way into the United States and alternative healing methods, influenced or adopted from Eastern practices, rose in popularity.*

At the beginning of the twentieth century, new sources of mental concentration and healthy habits for the mind were diverse. New Thought, also known as “mind-cure,” offered guidance in mental repose, serene inwardness, divine immanence, mysticism, and openness to many spiritual paths. Headed by Horatio Dresser and Ralph Waldo Trine, New Thought melded Christian emphases with knowledge of comparative religions and was influenced by the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson, as well as the German Romantics and British Idealists, Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg, spiritualism, Viennese hypnotist Franz Anton Mesmer, and the mesmerist Phineas P. Quimby.⁷ The Theosophical Society, established in New York in 1875, and its towering figure, Madame Blavatsky, played a significant role in “wedding Eastern esotericism and Eastern religious traditions and in popularizing concepts such as maya, karma, and meditation.”⁸ In psychology, Sigmund Freud was pioneering theories of the unconscious and William James explored the role of “vital reserves,” “energy,” and “healthy-mindedness”—“the

* For example, Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), a follower in India of the reformer Ramakrishna (1836–1886), gained a following after his famous performances at the Parliament of the World’s Religions in Chicago in 1893; audience members at his lectures included William James, Gertrude Stein, and George Santayana, among others. See Philip Goldberg, *American Veda: From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation. How Indian Spirituality Changed the West* (New York: Harmony Books, 2010), 79. Ruth St. Denis, student of Vivekananda’s disciple Swami Paramananda, created and performed pieces such as “The Yogi,” which included choreographed yoga poses and passages from the *Bhagavad Gita*. In her autobiography, St. Denis describes meditating before performances: she would “for a brief thirty minutes realize [her] contact with the one Mind” and, through an inner discipline, dissolve lingering irritations. Getting in touch with the “impersonal spirit” led her to feel that “by the time [she] had left to go on the stage [she] was truly the priestess in the temple.” Ruth St. Denis, *Ruth St. Denis, an Unfinished Life: An Autobiography* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1939), 87.

tendency which looks on all things and sees that they are good.”⁹ This abundance of methods focusing on physical, mental, and spiritual health might have resulted from the pressures of industrialization and urbanization, as well as the dismay resulting from the First World War.¹⁰ To counteract strain in the nervous system, or “neurasthenia,” and excess tension in the body, many of these physical and mental approaches emphasized self-integration, mental control, free movement, repose, and rejuvenation—themes that arose also in Bentley’s work.

Educator in Washington, D.C., New York City, and upstate New York

Bentley was born in Chateaugay, New York, in 1869, daughter of John and Eunice Bentley, and sister of J. E., George, and Charles Bentley. She began teaching music in the Washington, D.C., public school system in 1891 and became the Director of Music for the Washington public schools in 1900. With the aid of eighteen assistants, she oversaw music education from grade school through high school levels in more than two hundred schools. Contemporary newspapers applauded her work: her “administration has been a most successful one”;¹¹ her recital with one thousand school children in Convention Hall in Washington, D.C., on June 3, 1905, was celebrated as a “fine exhibition of what may be accomplished with youth and was at the same time, a tribute to Miss Bentley’s energy and musical insight.”¹² As one critic put it, “Under Miss Bentley’s instructions to the students, even the little dots in the lower grades have displayed voice qualities of unusual awareness, while their phrasing, distinct, has been the subject of much favorable comment.”¹³ Her 1907 recital in Washington, D.C., with five hundred school children, was of “very high order”; President Roosevelt and his family were among the patrons, complimenting Bentley and the children “on the quality and enjoyableness of entertainment.”¹⁴

In 1911, Bentley resigned and began teaching at the Ethical Culture School in New York, an epicenter of progressive education, where she developed “rhythm in connection with the play songs and games of little children.”¹⁵ The Ethical Culture School had been a leader in educational innovation, introducing “the free kindergarten, manual training, art work, nature study, festival work, ethical instruction.”¹⁶ A school of progressive education was well suited to Bentley’s pedagogical approach, which valued students’ own experiences with learning and developing their creativity, imagination, and self-expression through music and movement.

Bentley also started offering music and dance lessons at Studio 61 in Carnegie Hall, where she taught from 1912 to 1938.* Studio 61 was, for many years, the largest dance rehearsal space in New York City; Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn, and Mikhail Mordkin worked there. Ethel Peyser, in her 1936 account of Carnegie Hall, noted that Bentley viewed her dance studio as a “soul laboratory” to develop the mind, body, and soul through dance.¹⁷ Peyser commented, “In her work she has stressed the value of sandals, life, relaxation, and even a vegetarian diet!”¹⁸ Peyser quoted Bentley praising the venue: “I feel there is something definitely valuable in the traditions of this place, which makes our work easier here, and in the vibrations which sustain us. In short, New York means Carnegie Hall to me.”¹⁹

At Carnegie Hall, Bentley had several students who later became famous in the realms of dance, music, performance, and education. Their writings reveal clues to Bentley’s teaching methods. In her autobiography, actor and singer Mary Ellis (1897–2003) described Bentley as “a

* When asked about gaining access to teach at Studio 61, Gino Francesconi, archivist at Carnegie Hall, noted,

The studios were for rent to anyone. A person could request a space and be put on a waiting list. Or would be given another available space with the intention of moving into the requested space when it became available. There were many long-term leases. Sometimes when a tenant was about to give up a space, they could recommend someone to take over the lease. Each situation was different. Some tenants moved within the studios several times. Certainly knowing the rental agent, Leonora Shier, helped! (Email communication with the author, July 5, 2016).

remarkable woman with a noble Roman face and a short mane of grey hair”;²⁰ her “ringing voice . . . could raise the roof,” and she possessed “a kind of robust earthiness.”²¹ In her view, Bentley had “developed an amazing combination of yoga, eurhythmics, dancing exercises, vegetarianism, and relaxation.”²² Bentley taught her students to “cook and eat in a way that has become commonplace today. She called it all ‘fundamentalism.’”²³ Ellis became a “demonstration pupil” in Bentley’s summer school and Bentley helped her through many “stumbling-blocks of extreme shyness.”²⁴ Volunteering at hospitals during World War II, Ellis instructed a small group of children, evacuated from war-torn areas and gave fitness exercises to the staff, modeling them on Bentley’s classes. Her lessons from Bentley in her youth “became a god-send to tired nurses.”²⁵

Choreographer, dancer, and director Jerome Robbins (1918–1998) was another famed student of Bentley’s. He came into contact with her through his sister Sonia, who studied ballet with Michel Fokine and also took classes with Bentley. Sitting on the floor in Bentley’s Carnegie Hall studio and watching his sister practice and take classes helped expose Robbins to dance.²⁶ He also took some classes himself. In his autobiographical notes, he wrote: “I liked it—there was no technique of body exercises . . . taught. We did things like ‘folding’ (slowly collapsing in an embryonic heap on the floor), prancing (a deer-like lifting of the feet from the floor); I think we did trees, clouds, storms, waves + used silk scarves, balloons, & anything airy & diaphanous.”²⁷ Through Bentley’s classes, Robbins started becoming aware of his creativity: “What it gave me immediately was the absolute freedom to make up my own dances without inhibition or doubts.” He noted that Bentley’s classes were similar to Isadora Duncan’s in the choice of classical music and costume, and to “‘feel’ dancing, i.e. one ‘expressed’ the music as one felt it & it could go joyously or tragically, lightly or monumentally.” Even though Robbins called Bentley a “spin off”

of Duncan, he also admitted, “How the relationship worked I’m not sure.” His sister thought that, in Bentley’s creatively inclined classes, Robbins came to admire the mazurkas and waltzes by Chopin that audiences for *The Concert* (1956) and *Dances at a Gathering* (1969) would later laud.²⁸

Aside from teaching at Carnegie Hall, Bentley conducted summer dance camps at her lodge at Chateaugay Lake in Merrill, New York, close to the Canadian border. The site was hailed as “one of the finest at the lake resort.”²⁹ The camp included a large rustic lodge, a boathouse, and several cabins and tents. The roomy lodge near the lakeshore featured a screened-in dining porch with seats for fifty to sixty campers, most of whom were women, who lived in tents around the lodge. An advertisement in 1906 described the lodge as offering “unusual advantages to persons desiring to take a vacation in the mountains. . . . The best hunting and fishing is to be had, and the aim of the managers of the lodge is to offer a specially good table. The purest of water is obtainable and the terms are reasonable, ranging from \$10.00 to \$18.00 a week.”³⁰ Camp Owlyout (a 1906 article claimed this was a Native-American word for “the breath of the free spirit”) served as a gathering place for artists, writers, musicians, and dancers.³¹ Critic Irving Howe described the camp as a place where “intellectuals came to take the rhythms.”³² Poet and critic Louis Untermeyer, singer and actress Geraldine Ferrar, and Freudian analyst Trigant Burrow, among others, had places near the lake and came in touch with Bentley’s camp.* Bentley’s boathouse was used as a gallery for the work of artists who gathered around Lake Chateaugay.

* See Burrow’s letters to Bentley in Trigant Burrow, *A Search for Man’s Sanity: The Selected Letters of Trigant Burrow with Biographical Notes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 120–21, 460–1, 575. The letters display affection and admiration; for example, in a letter from December 18, 1943, Burrow wrote,

I thought afterwards of how much you had accomplished, how much your life and work have meant to so many people—so many young people whose lives would have been very different

Bentley's camp promoted healthy living and free expression through movement. According to Kim Townsend, the participants of the summer camp came to learn dance and to improve their diets, "with proteins one day, for example, carbohydrates another, and—always—with enormous salads."³³ Mornings were dedicated to breathing exercises and physical exercises. The exercises took place on the dance green or "studio" overlooking the lake, or, on rainy days, in an assembly hall, the Shack. Afternoons were free for the participants to take walks, sunbathe, or boat on the lake. Before sunset, dancing and movement improvisation sessions began, the participants in floating robes and barefoot, to classical music (see Figure 2, p33). The "studio" was a clearing in the woods, surrounded by birches: "There they would dance or improvise while Miss Bentley, winding away and shouting encouragement, played Beethoven and Brahms on the Victrola. 'Let go! Let go!' she would cry, as her pupils moved and assumed poses that they thought expressed the rhythms of their feelings."³⁴ There was no fixed choreography and group dancing was informal. According to Bentley's students and friends, yoga was a part of her teachings at the summer camps; however, no description remains to ascertain what type of yoga she practiced and/or espoused. The camp was initially designed for women from the age of sixteen up, although, later, campers also included children.³⁵ (See Figure 3, p34.)

Writer Sherwood Anderson (1876–1941), author of the famed short-story sequence *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), became aware of Bentley's teaching at this camp during his two summers in the Adirondacks.³⁶ His future wife, Tennessee Mitchell (1874–1929), a piano tuner, musician, sculptor, and artist, attended the workshops, assisted Bentley, and became a dance teacher herself. Their wedding, with Bentley as a witness, took place in the summer of 1916 near

and would have held far less of gladness, beauty and achievement but for you. I was wishing I could have you see this, and take from it the comfort, the joy and the deep satisfaction that is very justly yours if you will permit yourself to recall all those young faces that must brighten today and every day because of the thought of you. (p. 460)

Bentley's camp.* At the camp, Anderson would do the morning exercises along with Mitchell and then retreat to the Tenthouse to write for the rest of the morning and go canoeing, sunbathe, or walk in the woods in the afternoons. He would watch and sometimes join the dancing in the evenings: "Sherwood remained very much his own man at Camp Owllyout, but in the dancing even he generally followed the Bentley command to the tense mind and body, 'Let Go.'"³⁷

Mitchell participated in the entire Bentley program, including the morning exercises and dancing in the evening. Walter Rideout observed, "If she could not 'get' how she wanted to express herself in motion, she would go off calmly to the edge of the green, stand there concentratedly thinking out what she should do, then come back and do it in her physically elegant way."³⁸

Critic Harry Hansen quoted a friend: "Imagine this lovely camp of the nymphs out in the open, girls dressed in lovely Greek draperies, dancing in the grass with their feet twinkling in the sun, and Sherwood the only faun in the camp, dancing with them, spinning long yarns in the drowsy days under the old trees."³⁹ Anderson later recounted doing Bentley's exercises on his own, perhaps ironically commenting on her more mystical teachings, "Going about in my hotel room, half-praying, stretching my arms, doing Alys Bentley's breathing exercises. She says, 'There is in the air a mysterious quality of life. You have to reach for it. Reach. Reach.' I reached but didn't get it."⁴⁰

* Harry Hansen wrote that Mitchell, wearing "the costume of the rhythmic dancers—a short smock dress, with her hair in long braids down her back and her feet bare," and Anderson, along with Bentley, "the high priestess of the dance," "climbed into a wagon and an old man drove them many miles over the colorful hillsides to a rural justice of the peace." Harry Hansen, *Midwest Portraits: A Book of Memories and Friendships* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1923), 174. After the ceremony, Tennessee and Sherwood spent a few honeymoon days at Split Rock, a cottage owned by Bentley.

Margaret H'Doubler and “natural” movement educators

During the time Bentley was teaching at Carnegie Hall and conducting her summer camp, she came in touch with H'Doubler—a significant encounter in the history of dance education. In 1916, H'Doubler spent a year in graduate study at Teachers College, Columbia University. Blanche Trilling, chair of women's physical education at the University of Wisconsin, where H'Doubler was then working, had asked her to visit New York's leading dance studios to find a form of dance that could be suitable for higher education classes, a form that did not rely on imitating a teacher's or creator's personal style and codified movement technique. Between the fall of 1916 and the spring of 1917—coinciding with H'Doubler's study at Columbia—Ruth St. Denis performed in New York and across the country; in the fall of 1916, Isadora Duncan returned to New York from a South American tour. Yet H'Doubler did not mention either of these artists.⁴¹ At the time H'Doubler was in New York, two other dance educators were searching for their movement forms: Gertrude Colby, who was then teaching dance at Columbia, and Bird Larson, who moved from being a professor of physical education at Barnard College to teaching and exploring natural movement forms privately, at a rented studio. H'Doubler most probably came in contact with these figures but did not mention them while recounting the influences on her during the year at Teachers College.⁴²

H'Doubler repeatedly did, however, talk about Bentley. In April 1917, when H'Doubler's time in New York was coming to an end, Trilling wrote with one last suggestion: “I wish you would look up a woman who does not teach dance but is a music teacher and has her students move in relation to music. Her name is Alys Bentley.”⁴³ H'Doubler complied. Bentley, at the time teaching at Carnegie Hall, was interested in H'Doubler's search for a dance form to take back to Madison and allowed the young educator into her classes with seven girls who had

studied with her for years. H'Doubler remembered Bentley as a highly creative person and teacher; she admired that Bentley did not teach students set songs or melodies but had them create their own.⁴⁴ Significantly, H'Doubler was profoundly affected by how Bentley started her classes:

She had us begin by lying on the floor. . . . [T]he whole thing dawned on me just like that.

I said, of course, get on the floor where we are relieved from the pull of gravity, no balance—I had had anatomy and all these things before I went to her. Where you could work out and see what the structural response was to change of position in movement.

Why it was like a quick flash. I got so excited.⁴⁵

H'Doubler noted that Bentley wanted her to stay in New York and work out her technique, remarking, “You never can accomplish anything in education in a college. That’s the last place for you to go.”⁴⁶ Bentley probably feared that a formal educational system and institutional hierarchy would not be conducive to pedagogical innovation; the independence of a studio setting might be more fruitful for experimenting with new ways to approach movement. However, H'Doubler’s response was, “I don’t want studio work, I want to teach.”⁴⁷

H'Doubler’s classes, which she started offering after she returned to Madison in the summer of 1917, largely followed Bentley’s movement ethos. She began the class with students lying on the floor, a radical notion for “proper college women at the time,” a position that allowed students to freely move their bodies and explore its structural possibilities.⁴⁸ She used creative movement and movement explorations, very different from ballet training, a more common frame of reference for a dance class. H'Doubler introduced to academe dance classes that included guided self-discovery, student-centered learning, and creativity. As Susan Leigh Foster has pointed out, “Abhorring any pedagogical approach based on imitation of movement

routines, H'Doubler arranged classes so that students improvised most of the movement rather than copying combinations performed by the teacher."⁴⁹ Dance became a mode for kinesthetic, cognitive, and bodily discovery and a way to develop a "free and full individual,"⁵⁰ goals which might seem familiar to many dance educators today.*

Through H'Doubler's work, strongly influenced by Bentley, the beginning stages of academic dance education in the United States were thus focused on an individual's exploration of bodily movement, sensations, and knowledge of the self in movement, rather than on professional dance performance, a focus that became prominent later.[†] Bentley, similarly to H'Doubler, Larson, and Colby, was invested in exploring new movement forms that did not prescribe choreography and a preset movement style and that, unlike the innovations of Loïe Fuller, Isadora Duncan, and Ruth St. Denis, were not meant for stage performance or for training dancers. Each worked in a different educational setting—H'Doubler, Larson, and Colby in academia, and Bentley and later Larson at private studios. Each had her own focus, such as dance pageantry (Larson), dance pantomime (Colby), and the body's structural possibilities (H'Doubler). What differentiated Bentley's approach was her background in music and her

* The aim of developing individual movement, free expression, and knowledge of the "whole" self, gained through movement, is very much akin to contemporary sensory-based dance practices in the field of somatics, including, among others, 5Rhythms, Nia dance, JourneyDance™, SoulMotion®, and Tamalpa Life/Art Process, developed by Anna Halprin (who studied with H'Doubler) and Halprin's daughter Daria Halprin.

[†] Beatrice Richardson, alumna of the University of Wisconsin, in 1937 described H'Doubler's epiphany in dance education:

It was while working with Miss Alys Bentley that sudden realization, so common in genius, came to Miss H'Doubler. Although Miss Bentley was primarily a music teacher, she made approach to her field through bodily movement; and these two avenues of stimulation combined in some way to produce for Miss H'Doubler a clear concept of her goal—that goal, now as then, to be the expression of the individual's experience in terms of artistic movement; to deepen finer concepts by such artistic expression; and always to bring about further development of the individual personality. One must realize that such a goal could never become confused with professionalism and competitive production which runs rampant in all professional studios and even now threatens decadence to professional dancers. Quoted in Thomas K. Hagood, *Legacy in Dance Education: Essays and Interviews on Values, Practices, and People* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2008), 23.

investigation of the links between music and movement, particularly spontaneous physical movement in response to music.

However, it is interesting to compare Bentley's approach to dance with that of Isadora Duncan, perhaps the best-known exponent of bodily self-expression at that time. Duncan first performed in New York City in 1898 and then in 1908 at the Criterion, with concerts in Europe in between. Critics praised her use of gesture in movement and the apparent spontaneity and naturalness of her flowing movements and garments. Bentley did not mention Duncan in her writings, nor did she study with Duncan. The movement descriptions of Bentley's students indeed do suggest that both figures might have held similar ideas on free expression in movement, but there is no indication that Bentley copied Duncan's movements or deliberately promoted her ideas. Rachel Fensham has noted that the "scarf-waving" Isadora Duncan has appeared to be a "prime mover in [the] rebellion" questing for "expressive," "interpretative," or "free" performance genres that set themselves decidedly apart from ballet and the popular dances of music hall and vaudeville. However, Fensham continues, Duncan "was not alone, for there were many others who embraced notions of the 'natural' as an underlying philosophy for art."⁵¹ Indeed, it is worthwhile to search for what was unique in Bentley's approach, rather than categorizing it quickly as, in any way, an "imitation" of Duncan.

Dalcrozean eurhythmics, embodied learning, and the dance impulse

According to Kim Townsend, the participants of Bentley's summer camp learned Dalcroze eurhythmics, which Bentley called "motormental rhythms."⁵² What was Bentley's relationship with Dalcroze eurhythmics and how does she theorize rhythm? Clearly, Bentley was not alone in her interest in rhythm at this time. Michael Golston argues that the period between 1890 and

1940 in the United States and Europe witnessed an intense investigation of the perception of rhythm, manifested in the abundant theoretical work on rhythm not only in the arts, but also in the sociopolitical and biological arenas.⁵³ In a 1913 article, psychologist Christian Rucksmith commented on the critical attention paid to rhythm: within psychology, “it has been related to attention, work, fatigue, temporal estimation, affection, and melody,” and it is “frequently mentioned in connection with music, literature, biology, geology, gymnastics, psychology, and pedagogy.”⁵⁴

Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865–1950), Swiss music educator and composer, developed eurhythmics, a method of learning and experiencing music through movement. Dalcroze wanted his students to be able to hear music inwardly, to feel and imagine the music that they were writing in their harmony classes. As a conductor, he realized that musicians respond to the conductor’s physical expression, an insight that influenced his theories of feeling rhythm through the body. Musical rhythm is not “a mere mental affair; it is physical in essence,” he argued.⁵⁵ Dalcroze noted that human beings feel rhythmic vibrations in all muscles; the muscular system should thus be attended to first in musical training, “so that every muscle may contribute its share in awakening, clarifying, and perfecting rhythmic consciousness.”⁵⁶ Eurhythmic exercises “enable the individual to feel and express music corporally, for his own pleasure, thus constituting in themselves a complete art, in touch with life and movement.”⁵⁷ The exercises aimed at not only increasing bodily understanding of music, but also at strengthening the power of concentration and preparing the body “at high pressure in readiness to execute orders from the brain, to connect the conscious with the sub-conscious.”⁵⁸ The exercises aimed to create new reflexes, to allow for maximum effect by minimum effort, and to “purify the spirit, strengthen the will-power, and install order and clarity in the organism.”⁵⁹

Dalcroze's eurhythmics institute at Hellerau became an important part of the European musical and theatrical scene in the early 1900s, attracting students and teachers from across the world. Although he had been teaching eurhythmics as a professor of music in Switzerland before being invited to Hellerau in 1910, it was there that his work became widely known by artists and dancers. The first introduction of Dalcroze's ideas to American audiences has been attributed to Charles Ingham's 1911 *Good Housekeeping* article, which described his six weeks of study with Dalcroze.⁶⁰ While Dalcroze never visited the United States, pioneers of his work started teaching his method in various parts of the country between 1912 and 1915.⁶¹ The first American school to offer full certification in eurhythmics was the New York Dalcroze School of Music, founded in 1915. Eurhythmics courses were offered at forty-three colleges and schools by 1929; this number had grown to seventy by 1930.⁶² Although not primarily concerned with dance, Dalcroze's theories influenced dancers and the development of modern dance in the United States—for example, through the work of Rudolf Laban and Mary Wigman, both Dalcroze students.⁶³

As I will discuss, Bentley's first approach to training musicians shows a concern similar to Dalcroze's: developing an understanding of music through physical movement. However, it is difficult to see Bentley as a follower of Dalcroze for several reasons. First, Bentley's three books that discuss teaching music through movement, published between 1907 and 1910, could have been written simultaneously with, but independently from, the introduction of Dalcrozean principles in the United States,⁶⁴ since Dalcroze's *Rhythm, Music and Education* was first translated into English and published in 1921 and his *Eurhythmics, Art, and Education* was published in English in 1930.⁶⁵ However, his teachings could indeed have arrived in the United States through musicians and composers who studied in Europe before the turn of the century

and come to Bentley's awareness. Second, Bentley did not mention Dalcroze in her writings. Third, as I will show, Bentley appeared more interested in educating the "whole child" than in teaching solely musical principles. Fourth, particularly later in her life, her work increasingly focused on dance, health, and movement for relieving tension, rather than on music itself.

Bentley's writings on music and the theoretical writings that accompany the books of songs that she composed show that she explored ways to engage the learner's physical, emotional, intellectual, and imaginative faculties in the learning process. In *The Song Primer* (1907), she introduced her selection of songs as those "from the singing of which we get the largest spontaneous participation of the whole child, of his body, his mind, and his spirit."⁶⁶ While these works were mostly concerned with children's education, Bentley also wanted to reach adult audiences. In *Child Life in Song and Speech* (1910), Bentley wrote that she hopes to help the experienced artist to "get back, through training and technique, to the spontaneous, joyous expression of the child," which constitutes "the aim of all those wearisome years in the studio."⁶⁷ By observing and analyzing the "unconscious freedom of the child," Bentley aimed to find the means to preserve that freedom into adulthood.

Studying how children express themselves with their entire being, Bentley emphasized, in these works and in her teaching, the use of the whole body. The cornerstone of Bentley's teaching of music was tapping into physicality and bodily expression forms. In 1915, Earl Barnes described Bentley's teaching:

Miss Alys Bentley, of the Ethical Culture School in New York, is now doing some very remarkable work with young children in the schools, with classes in various parts of the country, and at her summer camp in the Adirondacks, in developing musical exercises. Beginning with the large muscle masses and guided by carefully selected music the child

is led to a series of correlated movements, some of them based on the activities of the animal world. Working from the spinal column as the center, the children acquire a freedom of movement and the power of expression through correlated series that extend to every part of the organism. Through this perfected rhythmical body, the student is then led on to express the feeling awakened in him by various musical compositions. This preserves the individual variant and it should prevent excessive intellectualism.⁶⁸

Singing, according to Bentley, should “involve the spontaneous action of the big muscles of the body,” and the rhythmical movement of the large muscles of the torso and arms should be “within the realm of perfect naturalness.”⁶⁹ The way to keep the rhythmic movement spontaneous was through imitating rhythms that occurred in the movements of play. For example, Bentley described a creative way to explore tone by letting students imitate different sounds of the wind:

Let the arms, representing tree branches, sway lightly at shoulder height, the whole body moving rhythmically back and forward. The nostrils are open, and alive. The different sounds of the wind, its sighing, moaning, crying in the pines are imitated as accompaniment of the rhythmic swaying of arms and body—the arms swaying always upward for the incoming breath, downward for the outgoing breath.

Then we can imitate the gentle blowing sound of the wind in the poplar leaves, and our hand can be the leaves which flutter and move in the soft breeze. The sound of the storm in the mighty elm or birch tree, will suggest a twisting or bending and swaying of the whole body. This time the tone is a whistling sound. The wind will blow some of the trees over, unless their roots are firmly planted in the ground. The children will readily catch the spirit of this.⁷⁰

While the movements for the arms and hands might seem fairly set, even prescribed, Bentley did not give instructions along the lines of “lift the arm, bend and extend from the elbow” but rather she offered students a range of images and allowed movements to arise out of what sounds almost like a story. The students were able to come to the movement on their own terms: each student’s particular movement could look different, unique. Mimicking sounds, such as the “sighing, moaning, crying” of the wind, brought about corresponding physical movement: for example, the “whistling” sounds of a storm would “twist,” “bend,” or “sway” the entire body. Producing the sounds of waves would make the arms “naturally imitate the big swell or the smaller splash of the waves.”⁷¹ For Bentley, making the sounds of bees, bells, seashells, scissors, sawmills, bending pines, rustling poplar trees, and electric fans served as a way to teach crescendo, diminuendo, and ritard. In her view, rhythmical movement of the large muscles of the torso frees the vocal mechanism, “making it possible for the child spontaneously to express his individuality, day by day, according to his own moods and desires.”⁷² The exercises can increase breath control, stimulate imagination, strengthen vocal chords, create a direct sense of “feeling and color,”⁷³ and free the voice from “its bondage of tense self conscious [*sic*] muscles.”⁷⁴

Bentley strove to make her students and readers comprehend movement not only viscerally but also in a more abstract sense. She attempted to cultivate the “feeling for movement,” the ability to view music itself as movement. She noted, “This matter of the movement of the song is a vital one, and it is an encouraging fact that even very little children have an unerring and delicate sense of the correct movement in songs.”⁷⁵ To get at this “feeling for movement,” Bentley drew a parallel between music and language: “Be very careful as to the movement, just as you would be in teaching reading. Put phrases together just as you do sentences.”⁷⁶ Music is a sequence of phrases and sentences, necessitating breathing and phrasing.

The “dance impulse” lay at the heart of Bentley’s approach to rhythm. In her view, the dance impulse is an inborn need to respond to music with movement and to express bodily rhythm via dancing: “The impulse to move the body in time with music is one of the basic instincts of the human being.”⁷⁷ In an article, published in 1914, Bentley explained the surge of new forms of dance and the prominence of popular dance forms at the beginning of the twentieth century in light of the dance impulse. In her opinion, ragtime offered the “first opportunity for basic musical expression” and marked the “first sincere national desire for music observable in the masses.”⁷⁸ She noted, “The first ragtime music stirred the pulses of our people, so that they began listening, not with their ears but with their hearts, and, as it were, with their feet.”^{79*} This dance impulse makes people move to music, but also brings other benefits: it should “aid in making life more natural,” developing “the true growth of our people,” and stimulating “organic growth.”⁸⁰ It allows for “the complete expression of a human soul,” evokes the “true art impulse,” and provides an opening for “nervous energy that seeks for an emotional outlet.”⁸¹

Bentley’s approach to the dance impulse and movement more broadly shows that her interest was not in dance for theater stages but in dance as belonging to a general audience. In her opinion, dance performances are popular because audiences see in the performers what they themselves desire to express: “Is it not the longing to set free in themselves a true art impulse, inherent in all of us and susceptible of training?”⁸² Public performances, in her opinion, can in fact “kill anything like true art impulses in the beholder” because they give rise to “the abnormal

* Bentley’s approach to ragtime differs markedly from Isadora Duncan’s disdain for “jazz rhythm,” which, Duncan wrote, “expresses the primitive savage” (Isadora Duncan, *My Life* [New York: Liveright, 1995], 244). In her earlier writings, however, Bentley seemed to regard “good music” quite narrowly as classical music. In an article published in 1905, she remarked: “It has been my theory always to teach only good music. The so-called popular music is that which is heard most often, and if all the hand organs of the city would play Beethoven instead of ragtime, the people of the city would soon be whistling Beethoven. There is just as much that is pleasing to the ear of a child in good music as in ragtime” (Alys Bentley, “Success with Music in Public Schools,” *Washington Post*, June 25, 1905, 8).

curiosity in regard to the artists” and the “excitement bred of all the uncreative emotions by which they are surrounded.” Movement training and experiences with expressing oneself through movement belong to “our people,” to “large numbers of people”; they are for crowds—but crowds who do not watch other people dance as audience but who dance themselves.

Bentley thus suggested that education is the realm most suited to nurturing the dance impulse. She claimed that the “first sincere national desire for music observable in the masses” had not been met with enough sympathy from educators and musicians. Instead, America had been “too much occupied in hewing forests, digging canals, laying tracks, erecting buildings, and acquiring material riches to pause and consider the need of its people for emotional and artistic expression.”⁸³ A disembodied way of teaching music, or what Bentley called “the mere blackboard teaching of music in our public schools,” whereby music is approached through intellect but not through emotion, physicality, and imagination, was responsible for the “failure to connect music and dancing with life.”⁸⁴ Her goal was thus to give students “ennobling music” and to “use that music to stimulate them to complete self-expression in bodily movement.”⁸⁵

The Dance of the Mind

In 1933, Bentley published *The Dance of the Mind*, a work which has eluded critical attention besides brief references to its existence.⁸⁶ Walter Rideout refers to “Bentley’s curious pamphlet” in his footnotes;⁸⁷ Janice Ross, too, calls it “a curious little book,” adding that it is “as much anticapitalist as pro a variety of health regimes,” and that it “has about it the simplistic ambiguity of a private fitness regimen touted as a cure for a global malaise.”⁸⁸ Aside from these comments, neither Rideout nor Ross delve into the book or provide more information about it.

These scholars' lack of deeper engagement with the text and the absence of further critical attention to it might stem from this book's experimental nature and playfulness. It is difficult to even place *The Dance of the Mind* in one particular genre: it is part health pamphlet, part manifesto, and part instructional manual, each developing the central themes of health, money, and mental habits (see Figure 4, p35). Above all, it is an artistic work, a work of experimental poetry that, in its form, explores the congruence of several art forms. The title, *The Dance of the Mind*, immediately signifies the work's concern with dance and movement. It poses the question: What is it like to sense the mind as movement, as dance? How would a reader imagine the mind as dancing? How does one capture a suggested dance movement of the mind in writing? The titles of the book's seven sections, each featuring a long narrative poem or a set of instructions rendered as poetry, evoke musical moods, genres, or forms: "Phantasy," "Prelude," "Five Etudes," "Scherzo," "Agitato," "Trio," and "Technique."

The book announces itself as a work of experimental poetry most immediately in its visual layout. The visually complex presentation of the work draws attention to the activity we engage in while reading: we move the eyes. From the very first page, words, phrases, and lines appear as different shapes: as circles, squares, domes, and arrows (see Figure 5, p36). Words are capitalized, syllables are repeated on multiple lines, lines ascend and descend, and letters are placed unevenly or look like falling raindrops. The different shapes make the reader question where to start reading: how does one read a text that is shaped into a square? The angular or swirling lines and shapes suggest movement, but they can also denote static, stable structures. For example, in "Trio," the phrase "human adjustment" is placed on a vertical line, flanked by the words "wealth" and "health" on the right and left (p. 19).*

* *The Dance of the Mind* does not include page numbers. For the sake of clarity in referencing, I have numbered the pages starting from "Contents" on page 1.

the center of the page, mimics the content, that of alignment. Throughout this work, readers' eyes are being asked to find new ways of moving on the space of the page—in lines, in circles, in jagged jumps—and as a result, to construct different meanings behind the words. This jostling movement for the eyes constitutes one way to experience “the dance of the mind.”

On the surface, *The Dance of the Mind* has a didactic component in that it advocates certain points of view. For example, the work repeats what sound like maxims: “Wealth consciousness produces more wealth. Health consciousness produces more health. It is the secret. It is the Law” (p. 32) (see Figure 6, p37).^{*} The writer's perspective gives the reader a moral lens through which to interpret the first poem in the book (pp. 3–11), which is about a man who lectures on financial abundance gained through prayer and advises his audience to kneel and ask for more. These suggestions are explicitly negated in the following poem, “Prelude,” in which the speaker addresses the reader: “You do not need to fall on your knees / You do not need to implore God” (p. 12). The writer, constantly addressing the reader, does not appear neutral, but rather seems to promote particular ways of seeing the world, drawing upon the Christian tradition as well as Eastern religions, apparent in the poem “Meditation of the Buddha” (p. 23) (see Figure 7, p38).

However, a number of the sections ask the reader to act, try out, and experience by means of instructions presented in the poems. As I will show, the majority of the book highlights the experiential, rather than the didactic, intent of the poems. The outcomes of the instructions that the poems offer can be different for each reader. Through what I refer to as “experiential sections,” Bentley developed a particular trait in her poetry: she used poetry to enact the notion

^{*} Bentley might have been contrasting her health prescriptions with those frequently found in self-improvement and personal development books advising readers about how to make money and get rich, popular themes during the Depression. For example, see Napoleon Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* (Robbinsdale, MN: Fawcett Publications, 1937).

of practice as a repeated exercise. The idea of poetry as enacting a practice, a reliance on formal experimentation, and playfulness with language bring Bentley's work in conversation with that of H.D. [Hilda Doolittle], Gertrude Stein, T. S. Eliot, and Langston Hughes,* among other modernist authors.⁸⁹ The works of many modernist writers reflected a wider interest in what poetry can do as a written word in texts and as a spoken word in recitation and elocution.

Bentley's section "Five Etudes" features a set of instructions on how to practice five well-known Christian dictums: "love one another," "love thy neighbor as yourself," "agree with your adversaries quickly," "judge not that ye be not judged," and "turn the other cheek" (p. 13). Next to "turn the other cheek," the reader finds: "practice this very slowly at first / increase the tempo / For velocity / For dramatic occasions / Intuitive climaxes / Practice this many hours" (p. 13). Instructions for moods, mindset, and time of the day are included: "practice this tenderly," "practice this daily in the early dawn," "accent all the weak passages / with understanding / with imagination / with humor / with kindness" (p. 13). The instructions echo the title, "Five Etudes," in that they add nuance to the original material, similar to adding variations in tempo and mood when practicing musical material.

The section titled "Scherzo" is experiential in that it asks readers to actively explore their values through self-reflection. This poem, extending over several pages, unfolds as a series of inquiries, such as, "Is there any state of existence known as Health? Do you know anything about it? Do you believe people have it naturally? . . . Can we buy it? Save it? Steal it? . . . Will an operation help? Christian Science? Psycho-Analysis? Battle Creek? Coue? Nature Cure? . . . Is it associated with money? Salary? Paying rent?" (p. 14). Here, Bentley showed her awareness of the various health movements of the time. Borrowing the playful mood of the title, the poem

* An interesting comparison could be made between Bentley's work and Langston Hughes's *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz* (New York: Knopf, 1961) in that both are long-form poetic works and use musical tropes.

poses surprising juxtapositions, such as, “Has it anything to do with what you eat? Drink? Do not drink? Think? Do not think? . . . Is there a certain amount of it in the world? Do you know anyone who has had it for a life time?” (p. 14). Some questions—“Can we find anything about it in this country?” or “Has education helped to find it?” (p. 15)—also bear politically and culturally critical overtones. Other questions appear tongue-in-cheek, while some provoke deeper reflections: “Do you have as much health as you want?” “Are you grateful that you are not in the hospital?” (p. 15). As a result of pondering these inquiries, one’s understanding of health, and of one’s beliefs and assumptions, can become heightened and more complex.

The poem “Technique” aims at raising readers’ awareness of how they speak and use language. Readers are asked to have one-minute conversations or write a letter to a friend without using “I,” “I am,” “I am not,” “I think,” “I do not think,” “I feel,” “I understand,” “I do not understand,” or “my life,” “my art,” “my work,” “my success,” and “my failure,” among others (pp. 24–27). These instructions are followed by commands or invitations to observe whether and how changing one’s linguistic habits around “I” and “my” affects the individual’s body and mind as well as interactions with others: “Observe how this will help you. Observe how this affects others” (p.24); “Observe the change in your feeling. Observe the change in people” (p. 29); and “Observe the change in your body. Observe the change in your Mind” (p. 30). This poem thus asks readers not only to experiment with new linguistic usages, but also to be mindful of their own physical and mental states and their interlocutors’ responses while executing these new linguistic behaviors. Bentley was here training the reader to be both inwardly and outwardly aware, attentive to one’s own and other people’s responses and behavior in acts of communication.

“Technique” resembles meditative or auto-suggestive practices that use language in an attempt to heal the mind and body. The reader is asked to repeat the phrases of “they/he/she are all right” about others: someone who is far away, very near, a person one does not like or has negative feelings toward (p. 29) (see Figure 8, p39). To contemporary readers this might sound like a loving kindness meditation that sends compassion to people near and far, people one loves, and to those with whom one struggles. Readers need to repeat “they are all right” or “it is all right,” moving sequentially through the body: the head, heart, eyes, throat, nose, ears, blood, nerves, circulations, back, spine, shoulders, hips, knees, ankles, feet, bowels, lungs, liver, kidneys, skin, glands, hair, and teeth (p. 30). The list moves from individual body parts to mental phenomena—the brain, mind, and thinking. Readers should send these parts of the body and mind a message that they are “all right” (p. 30). This sequential process suggests the body scanning practices found in many somatic and contemplative techniques. Here, readers are supposed not merely to observe the body, but also to try to heal it by sending their awareness, with a curative intent, to different body parts.

Why did Bentley cast these experiential exercises of mental and physical habits and practices of awareness in the form of poetry? A number of choreographers, dancers, and performance artists, particularly in the wake of experimental and improvisational dance forms in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, turned to the written word in search of artful linguistic ways to express sensory, intellectual, or spiritual experiences of movement and embodiment. For example, Simone Forti’s *Handbook in Motion* included essays and poetic writing, descriptions of scores and choreographed dances, and brief thought pieces similar to maxims, side by side with drawings, photographs, and images of handwritten text.⁹⁰ Deborah Hay, in *My Body, The Buddhist*, playfully and imaginatively experimented with language, text, and image in her

exploration of art, choreography, and philosophy of the body, drawing from Buddhism.⁹¹

Jackson Mac Low produced a series of poems used by Judson Church dancers to experiment with the possibility of performing incongruous actions.⁹²

However, it is rare in dance writing and in poetry to see a work that relies almost in its entirety on an artistic use of instructions, an explicit turn to “you,” rather than recounting the experiences of the “I,” the writer—the latter being much more common in experimental dance writing. As a rare example, Yoko Ono, in her collections *Grapefruit* and *Acorn*, made use of a range of possible writerly intentions and readerly responses to her instructional poetry. For example, “Clock Piece” in *Grapefruit* reads: “Steal all the clocks and watches / in the world. / Destroy them.” Under “Travel Piece,” in the same work, Ono says: “Make a key / Find a lock that fits. If you find it, burn the house / that is attached to it.” It is clear that these instructions are not to be followed but only exercised in imagination. “Drill a small, almost invisible, hole / in the center of the canvas and see / the room through it” is an example of instructions that could in essence be followed; it can serve as a creative prompt.⁹³ In *Acorn*, however, readers find many poems that invite participation: “Touch the earth directly with your bare feet. / Let the Earth energy circulate / from your feet to your head / and back again.”⁹⁴

The examples quoted above point to the question inherent in instructional poetry: Are these commands and invitations meant to be followed? Indeed, can they be followed? *The Dance of the Mind* is built upon an inherent tension: are readers going to submit to the speaker’s instructions? The experiential nature of Bentley’s poems discussed above is the work’s potential: these instructions might or might not be carried out. Unlike Ono’s work, it seems that Bentley’s intention was that the reader should execute rather than imagine her suggestions. However, by casting her work in a poetic form, Bentley gave the reader the license to not follow her

commands. Instructions in how-to books or health manuals imply that they are there to be followed: readers expect to see practical advice and suggestions in these genres. One turns to a work of poetry, however, primarily to have an aesthetic experience. Perhaps one reason why Bentley used poetry is that it offered her a more artistic way to present her ideas: the book offers imaginative, playful, creative ways for thinking about health, awareness, technique, and practice. Her ideas on health, cast in an artistic form, are not prescriptive or simply dogmatic; *The Dance of the Mind* creates a space for serious reflection and greater awareness of mental and physical habits in a form that is unusual and whimsical. Some of the text seems humorous and ironic, rather than didactic, and its methods are playful, much like the games Bentley used with children.

Conclusion

In 1927, Doris Humphrey, describing her ideas on choreography and dance, wrote:

I'm putting some of my ideas into practice—although they are not unique, I should rather say *the* idea that everybody is putting into use. Miss H'Doubler and the Germans, and Ronny and all the Bentleys and so forth are all using the same principle, which is that of moving from the inside out, so I don't feel that I'm stealing anybody's stuff.⁹⁵

Humphrey's reference to "the Bentleys" here likely refers to Alys Bentley and her followers. Humphrey captured one of the premises of early twentieth-century movement forms that emphasized "natural" movement and dancing "from the inside out." For Bentley, sharing the same moment in history with Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, Margaret H'Doubler, Gertrude Colby, and Bird Larson, "natural" dancing referred to spontaneous and improvisational dance movement that emerges in response to music: music activates "motormental" rhythms and unleashes the "dance impulse," discussed earlier. An intriguing thinker on connections between

movement and music in the early twentieth century, Bentley's theorizations of movement, expression, and soul originated in her view that "dancing is, of course, indissolubly married to music."⁹⁶

Bentley's approach to "natural" movement emanated less from adherence to idealized forms from nature or works of classical literature and art. Rather, her concept of the "dance impulse" was motivated by a growing interest in rhythm from neuropsychology and other branches of modern science.⁹⁷ In her view, the dance impulse allows movers not only to express themselves through music, but also to nourish their creativity and imagination—their "art impulse"—and to release nervous tension. This, she anticipated, would help individuals as well as nations to develop in healthy ways.

Yet Bentley's approach to movement was distinct. Her emphasis on kinesiology along with rhythm and improvisation was pioneering. It is possible that Bentley anticipated Mabel Elsworth Todd's 1937 *The Thinking Body* in her conception of motormental rhythms, her already ideokinetic idea that movement is imagined, and the starting of class with students doing movements lying on the floor, widely used in later somatic practices. Differently from Duncan, Bentley blended music, movement, and various forms of health awareness; her focus was not on dance for performance purposes or on emulating a teacher's movement and she left behind a substantial written pedagogical legacy. Her ideas on free movement expression and improvisation make her work relevant for contemporary somatic theorists and dance practitioners. Bentley's pedagogical writings should also be of interest to contemporary theorists of the kinesthetic classroom. Bentley's work brought to the field a body-conscious approach different from that of a physical education or dance classroom, a goal of today's embodied learning theorists and practitioners.⁹⁸

The Dance of the Mind provides insight into what Bentley's teachings on health and mystical knowledge might have been like. The text showcases her wide-ranging interest in contemporaneous health movements. It also shows how an artistic text—a book of poetry, not a health manual—can encourage readers to become more aware of the health of their mind and body. The exercises and instructions ask the reader to move back and forth between reading the poems and practicing these exercises in life, beyond the reading experience. The book proposes that it should not be read in a single sitting. Readers should take time to put the contents into practice and notice the outcomes: “Observe the change in your feeling. Observe the change in people” (p. 29). Building awareness of mental, physical, and linguistic habits and developing new ones take time and are a result of deliberate practice, the book suggests. This investigation of health, awareness, and technique is veiled as a work of art, as a carefully crafted work of poetry, both playful and serious. This artful literary work itself draws from multiple art forms—music, movement, and the visual arts. *The Dance of the Mind* is thus a testament to Bentley's belief in “the art impulse,” “inherent in all of us and susceptible to training.”⁹⁹

Bentley's sustained explorations and writings serve the field of dance and dance education in the United States more than has previously been recognized. Her encounter with H'Doubler was not the only significant event that gives Bentley a place in the history of dance. Her range of inquiries, her theoretical writings, and her literary-artistic explorations of movement through poetry demonstrate her significance to the field. Bentley's legacy spans from movement and music pedagogy to a highly health-conscious approach to education and dance, an aspect that is not highlighted enough in dance scholarship on the early twentieth-century dance pioneers. Bentley's dance teaching did not focus primarily on understanding musical principles, as would be the case in the Dalcrozean tradition. According to her students' writing, historical documents,

and critics' reviews, Bentley's approach was more capacious: she employed breathing exercises, physical exercises, yoga, creative movement, improvisation, and relaxation, and she also guided her students in healthful diet and in minimizing muscular and nervous tension. While her goal was not to teach professional dancers or a particular dance technique, movement stood at the center of her teaching. Her writing aims to convince us that through movement one connects to the internal rhythmic impulse, adopts habits of healthier living, learns to express oneself freely, and taps into joy and creativity.



Figure 1. "A Plastic Group," an image in Alys Bentley's article, "Some Higher Aspects of the Modern Dance Movement," *Vanity Fair* (April 1914), 18. According to the editor of *Vanity Fair*, this and all photographs featured in Bentley's article were made in collaboration with Bentley and "prove that the higher aspects of modern dance movement have widened the artistic possibilities of plastic outdoor photography" (p. 18). Photograph by Frances Benjamin Johnston and Mattie Edwards Hewitt. This image is in the public domain.



Figure 2. Dancing in nature, from Bentley's article, "Some Higher Aspects of the Modern Dance Movement," 19. Photograph by Frances Benjamin Johnston and Mattie Edwards Hewitt. This image is in the public domain.



Figure 3. Self-expression in bodily movement and music, from Bentley's article, "Some Higher Aspects of the Modern Dance Movement," 21. Photograph by Frances Benjamin Johnston and Mattie Edwards Hewitt. This image is in the public domain.

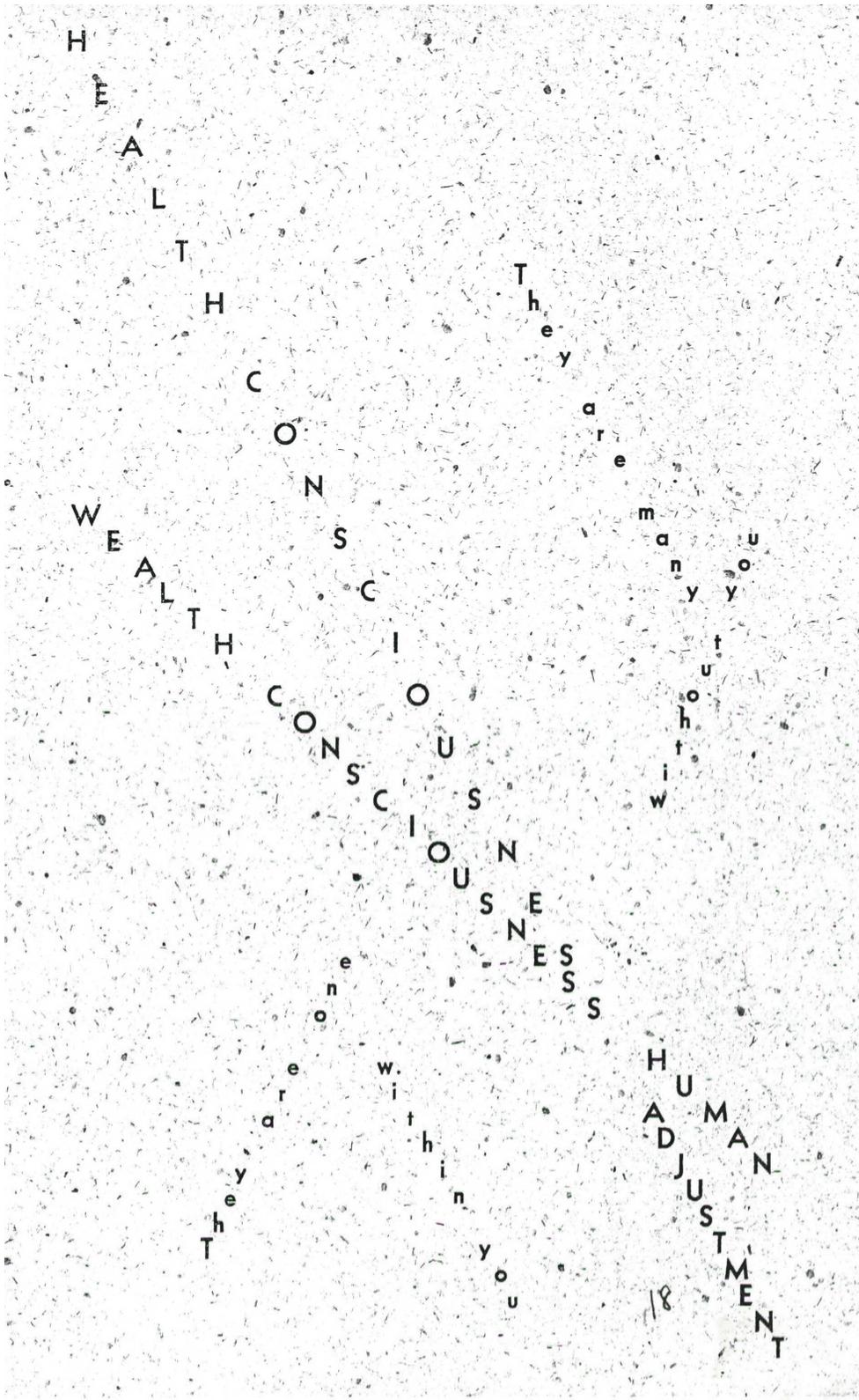


Figure 5. Example of the experimental form used in Bentley's *The Dance of the Mind*, 18. This work is in the public domain. Photograph by Hiie Saumaa.

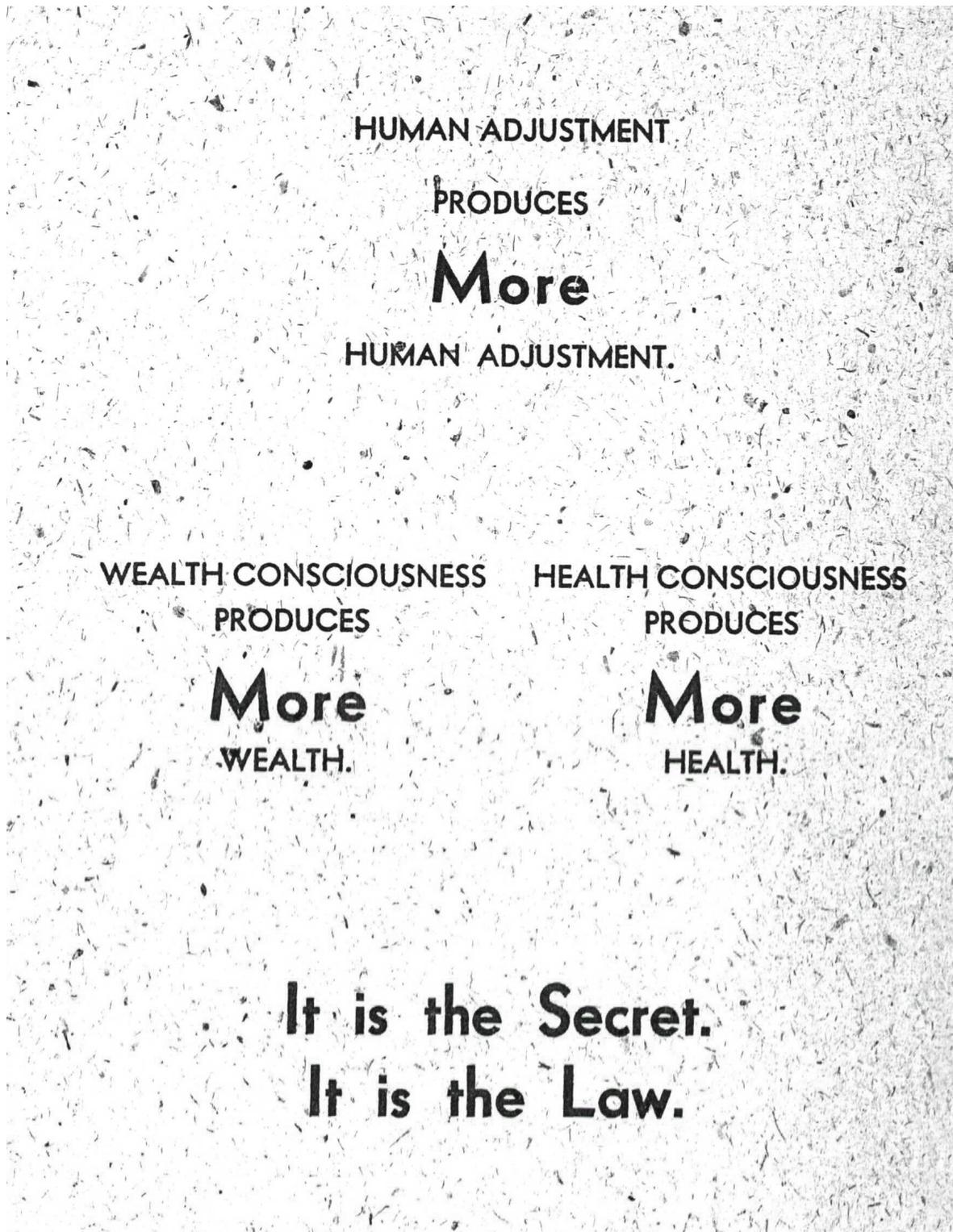


Figure 6. Manifesto-like pronouncements in Bentley's *The Dance of the Mind*, 32. This work is in the public domain. Photograph by Hiie Saumaa.

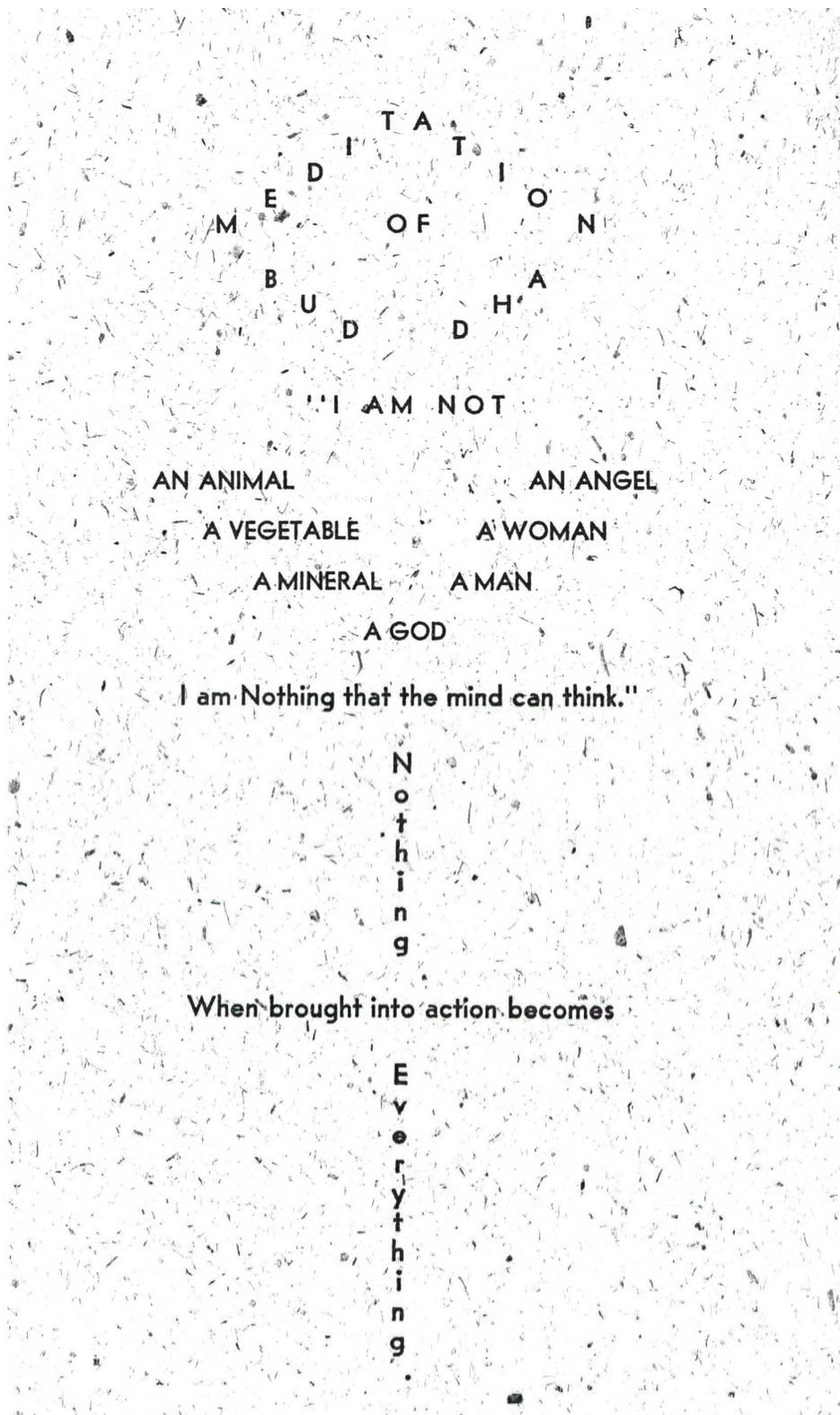


Figure 7. "Meditation of Buddha," in Bentley's *The Dance of the Mind*, 23. This work is in the public domain. Photograph by Hiie Saumaa.

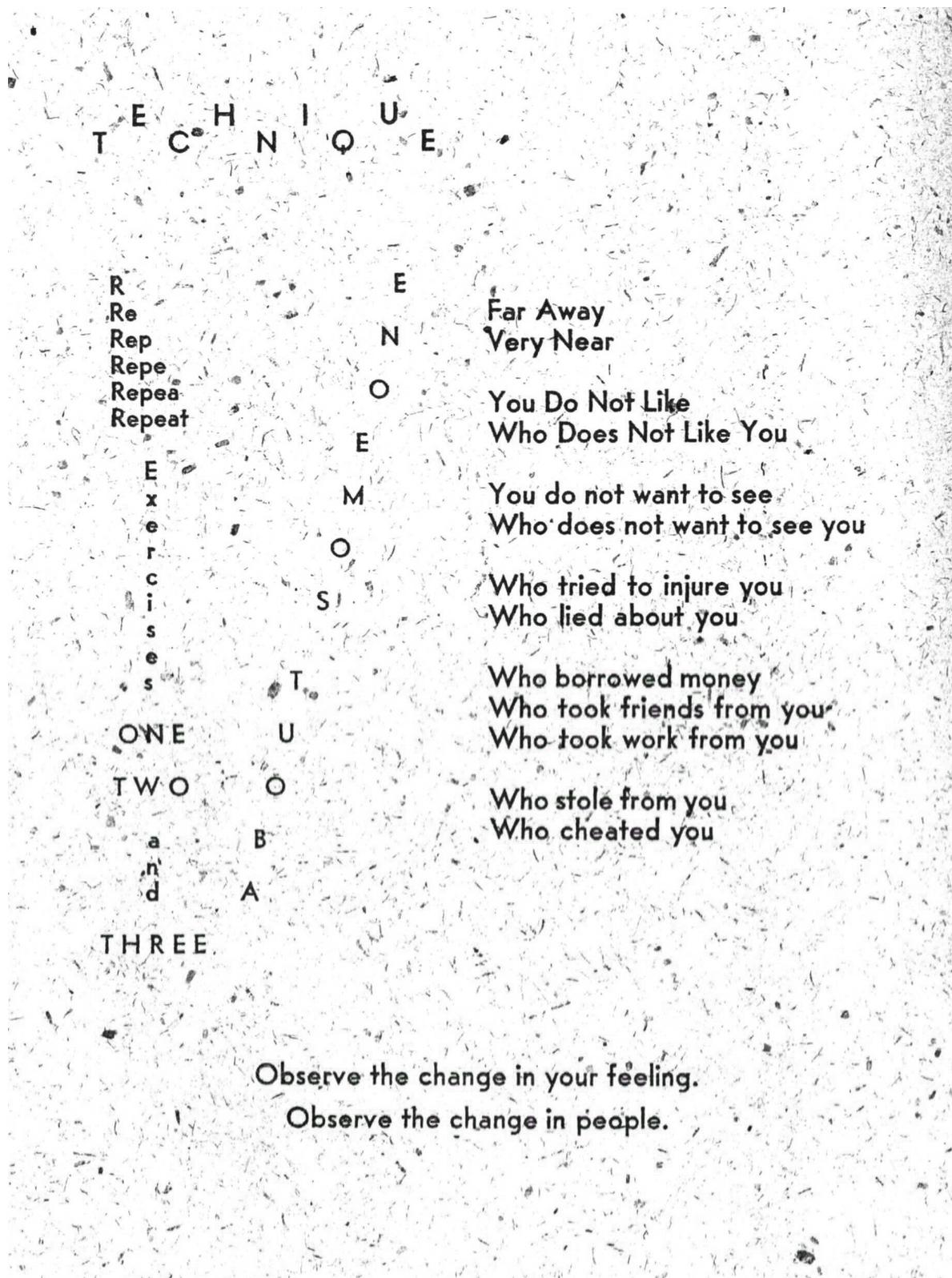


Figure 8. "Technique," in Bentley's *The Dance of the Mind*, 29. This work is in the public domain. Photograph by Hiie Saumaa.

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Notes

¹ Editor's Note to Alys Bentley, "Some Higher Aspects of the Modern Dance Movement," *Vanity Fair* (April 1914): 18.

² "Alys E Bentley Dies in Malone, N.Y.," *Dance News* (February 1951): 3.

³ Janice Ross, *Moving Lessons: Margaret H'Doubler and the Beginning of Dance in American Education* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000).

⁴ See Tim Armstrong, *Modernism: A Cultural History* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2005) and Jackson T. J. Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). On the various health-promoting practices in the era, see James Whorton, *Nature Cures: The History of Alternative Medicine in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) and *Crusaders for Fitness: The History of American Health Reformers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982). For the history and development of physical culture, see Harold Segel, *The Body Ascendant: Modernism and the Physical Imperative* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). See also Tim Armstrong, ed., *American Bodies: Cultural History of the Physique* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); Ana Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body: Classicism, Modernism, and the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Harvey Green,

Fit For America: Health, Fitness, Sport, and American Society (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986); Kathryn Grover, ed., *Fitness in American Culture: Images of Health, Sport, and the Body, 1830–1940* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989); Jennifer Hargreaves and Patricia Vertinsky, eds., *Physical Culture, Power, and the Body* (New York: Routledge, 2007); and Susan Harris Smith and Melanie Dawson, eds., *The American 1890s: A Cultural Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

⁵ See Bernarr Macfadden, *Macfadden's Physical Training* (New York: Macfadden Company, 1900) and *Vitality Supreme* (New York: Physical Culture Publishing Co, 1915); and Eugen Sandow, *Strength and How to Obtain It* (London: Galo & Polden, 1897) and *The Construction and Reconstruction of the Human Body* (London: John Bale, Sons, and Danielsson, 1907). See also Beth Mensendieck's texts on body sculpting and alignment in *The Mensendieck System of Functional Exercises* (Portland, ME: Southworth-Anthoensen Press, 1937) and *Look Better, Feel Better: The World-Renowned Mensendieck System of Functional Movements—For a Youthful Body and Vibrant Health* (New York: Harper, 1954).

⁶ On mind-body movements, see Anne Harrington, *The Cure Within: A History of Mind-Body Medicine* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008) and “A feeling for the ‘whole’: The holistic reaction in neurology from the *fin de siecle* to the interwar years,” in *Fin de Siecle and Its Legacy*, eds. Mikulas Teich and Roy Peters (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). See also Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter, *The Cultivation of Body and Mind in Nineteenth-Century American Delsartism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999).

⁷ For examples of the New Thought movement, see Horatio Willis Dresser, *A History of the New Thought Movement* (New York: Thomas Cromwell Publishers, 1919) and *The Power of Silence: An Interpretation of Life in Its Relation to Health and Happiness* (Boston, 1898). For accounts of

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⁸ Harry Oldmeadow, *Journeys East: 20th Century Western Encounters with Eastern Traditions* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2004), 51.

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