

Today's class draws on some ideas from someone Emile Jaques-Dalcroze (Swiss, 1865-1950) admired but never met, Francois Delsarte (French, 1811-1871)



Francois Delsarte

- Tenor at Opera Comique in Paris
- Developed aphonia and blamed that on the artifice of his training at the Paris Conservatory
- traveled through Europe and U.S. from 1840 onwards to teach his method
- never wrote a book, saying that his work was still developing
- for orators, painters, singers, composers, and actors
- to connect their inner emotional experience through gesture.
- students included Bizet, Rossini, Lamartine, Dumas, Gautier
- inspired later teachers including Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn, Rudolf Laban, and actor F.M. Alexander who developed their own methods based on gesture.

Delsarte invented what he called the Science of Applied Aesthetics, a thorough examination of voice, breath, movement dynamics, encompassing all of the expressive elements of the human body. His hope was to develop an exact science of the physical expression of emotions, but he died before he had achieved his goals. Delsarte had believed that true and believable acting came from an understanding of [affective physical motion and gesture](#).

The American dance pioneer Ted Shawn was influenced by the Delsarte system and wrote a book to collect some of Delsarte's thoughts.

*Every little movement*  
A book about Delsarte

By Ted Shawn (United States, 1891-1972)

- partnered with Ruth St. Denis to found the Denishawn School
- choreographed some of Martha Graham's early solos
- founder of Jacob's Pillow



## Selection of Quotes from *Every Little Movement*

From a lecture Delsarte gave in Paris. From Shawn, pp 22-23:

- 1) "If you own a telescope, what, may I ask, interests you in it? Why do you value it? Is it not because of the property it possesses of showing to your surprised eyes vast and profound perspectives, invisible without its aid? It is, then, the astounding views brought within the range of your vision that you love the instrument for, and certainly you would not dare to say that you love the telescope for the telescope. Now, art is the telescope of a supernatural world. In art one must love something besides art if one would know how to love art.
- 2) "Art in itself is not what you should love in art. However elevated in origin and magnificent in itself, art does not constitute an end. It is an ought to be in our eyes but a means, a sublime means without doubt, but only a means, nothing but a means. Any other manner of regarding art debases and degrades it, for it is in the Object, and not in the powers that one must seek the secrets of its grandeur. The powers of art are the wings of the soul. These wings have been given to indirectly promote its divine ascension. Now, the soul which stops to contemplate its wings will never rise; the beauty of the means can thus make it forget its aims and plunge it into a sensuous and sad idolatry."

From students' notes, as printed in Shawn pp 24-25:

- 3) "The principle of my system lies in the statement that there is in the world a universal formula which may be applied to all sciences, to all things possible. This formula is the Trinity. What is the requisite for the formation of a Trinity? Three expressions are requisite, each presupposing and applying the other two; there must also be an absolute co-necessity between them. Thus the three principles of our being: life, mind, and soul, form a Trinity. Because life and mind are one in the same soul; soul and mind are one in the same life; and life and soul are one in the same mind."
- 4) "To depend entirely upon inspiration is as bad as waiting for a shipwreck to learn how to swim. To leave everything to natural spontaneity is as bad as to make everything the result of mechanical predetermination. Spontaneity is genius in dramatic interpretation. Predetermination of expression is art. Perfection is the harmonious blending of the two. Many fine artists do not possess one atom of genius. Many geniuses are poor artists. A genius and an artist are different, frequently separate, persons. The great artist must first be a genius and then through training become the artist. The finished artist is one who has full and free knowledge, possession and control of that whole apparatus by whose means the sensations of life, ideas of mine, and affections of the soul are revealed. Knowledge, possession and control; there you have the artist."
- 5) "Gesture is the direct agent of the heart. It is the fit manifestation of feeling.... Nothing is more deplorable than a gesture without a motive, without meaning. Let your attitude, gesture, and face foretell what you would make felt..."

Further Reading: *Delsarte System of Dramatic Expression* by Genevieve Stebbins