

Chapter 12 Technique

Too often when a new idea is offered, it tends to further divide a confused world. With each new approach in philosophy, a cult may be founded. Let someone come to liberate the world and a small group will congregate around him, endeavor to exclude others, organize, and establish their own preeminence. This is the last thing desired here. There can be no school for "spiritual dancing." Life is an established fact. We want to increase it, perhaps, in a certain sense. We come to fulfill, not to destroy.

So no special technique is offered for spiritual dancing, other than the examples and suggestions cited. These can be studied and performed by followers of any school or method. The preparation, rather than the details, is stressed. Students of flamenco, carioca, ballet, tango, cake-walk, clog or any other school will benefit from the spiritual and other exercises and methods. They will benefit those interested in Gypsy and Cossack and Japanese dancing. They apply to the disciples of Zemach or to the devotees of the new schools. The purpose is to spiritualize life through the arts.

When we separate the spiritual from the "real," the "practical," and the "beautiful," we build a concept which of itself is not spiritual. Our **thought of God** is not divinity. It is one of the many thoughts of our mind and is less than we. Korzybski has pointed out that the word p-e-n-c-i-l is not a writing tool, it is a word. The word G-o-d is not the Divine Being, nor is the thought we hold the ultimate reality. Spirituality is beyond word and thought.

We may speak of God as the perfection of Beauty. This is not a new concept. The Greeks were quite familiar with it. But if anything is needed today it is an aesthetic revolution, one which will instill this dictum in our hearts and become effective in our lives. This revolution need not be destructive. It could further trends now on earth, integrating and selecting whatever is needed from the present or from past ages. We should strive to increase the beauty in life in general and in that of the individual in particular.

The Russian Revolution abolished old forms. It substituted a new social order and an accepted social philosophy. Human nature did not change therefore, and psychologically the upheaval was less than what appeared on the surface. To its friends, it introduced a group of messiahs. To its enemies it meant the substitute of tyrants without ancestry and breeding for those who certainly had ancestry and occasionally had breeding. But the revolution did stimulate art, especially the heterodox and new schools. And encouragement was given to the people to become more interested in all arts.

Then came a counterstroke. Art had an aim: not beauty, but propaganda. The new order started out to uproot everything ancient. But it had to admit that science is science and that chemistry and physics do not change because the cabinet falls. (That was before the time of "Pure Aryan **Science**.") Those who talk about socialistic biology and capitalistic biology are not very convincing. The demand for great ability and skill became more important than one's private philosophy of art. The popularization of art in Russia stimulated the aesthetic movement. Every talented person was encouraged, though handicraft became a state craft.

The revolution proposed goes deeper. It does not abrogate skill, but would offer encouragement to every type of artist. Even burlesque may remain. It does not say of the ballet that its prin-

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principles are contrary to physiological mechanics. It does not believe that the study and performance of ancient dances should be detached from art and joined to anthropology. All forms and methods would be utilized. Only a sincere feeling for beauty would be demanded.

In and around Hollywood there is at least one teacher whose methods are based upon cardiac mechanics and heart-concentration. Its pupils learn, more or less consciously, to invoke psychic forces. They imbibe philosophy from the dance itself. Their spiritual faculties unfold without anything being said of them. At the same time, they emphasize interpretative rather than program dancing. To them, the right interpretive dance offers full scope to the will of the performer and gives her every opportunity for self-expression.

The changes that are taking place today and may take place tomorrow may have their counterparts in the past. When Akbar was Emperor of India he proposed methods which were at once revolutionary and synthetic. What he accomplished in the political and religious arenas is more or less known, what he did with the arts has not been so broadcast. This great eclectic strove to preserve all the earlier culture and traditions that might be used for the benefit of his empire and its peoples. He encouraged all the arts and crafts, and rescued those that seemed doomed because of the clash of many conflicting interests.

His work with the dance is noteworthy. He worked hard to restore the ancient Vedic themes of apsaras and gandharvas. He encouraged Hindu teachers to come out of hiding and train their pupils openly. He protected the Islamic schools, too often engaged in bickering with one another, when they were not combating "idolatry" — that is to say, Hinduism. He encouraged the introduction of Persian forms and Arabic instruments. The Shankar whom we admire today is greatly indebted to this marvelous ruler.

Fundamentally, Akbar was a spiritual man and only incidentally an aesthete. He gave his allegiance to his spiritual teachers, Selim Chisti and Mubarak, Sufis of the Moin-ed-din Chisti School. This school specializes in the use of music for spiritual development, employing all three forms: vocal, instrumental and dance. Mubarak's sons held the highest positions at the Mogul court and cooperated loyally with their monarch. All arts were encouraged and wonderful buildings constructed. The work of Akbar was completed in the reign of his grandson, the celebrated Shah Jehan, builder of the Taj Mahal.

There have been societies in many places designed to preserve the folk arts. The harm done to them by this diabolic war can never be measured. The folk dances have a direct appeal. Their spirit belongs to the people. They illustrate the dance as an index to human character in accordance with Havelock Ellis' famous "What do you dance?" When civilization and order are restored, as restored they must be, let us remember that man does not live by bread alone. His spirit needs sustenance. The peacemakers should do their utmost to encourage these arts.

Folk dancing serves to preserve custom and costume. It offers outlets to the young in harmony with their lives, surroundings and physiognomy. By nature the Swede is built for his national dance and the Cossack to perform his. Every art in a sense is like an unwritten scripture containing the epitome of a civilization. And our understanding of dances will enable us to understand the people that perform them.

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Like his great forerunner, Emperor Akbar, Sufi Inayat Khan strove to unite the peoples of East and West in their devotional outlooks and in their quest for love and harmony and beauty. He saw in religion, in general, the search for the same supreme goal. He also wanted to maintain all the nationalistic and aesthetic methods of the arts to aid humanity in its quest for beauty. And generally speaking we are on the road to that goal. In America, for example, Massine and Mei Lang Fan, Astaire and Shankar have won public favor. This has not interfered with the restoration of the old square dances, once so popular. Nor has it affected the dance hall and salon. Indeed, there are many groups trying to popularize the dance in its many facets.

In this sense, too, we may need both classicism and romanticism. The social anthropologist would hesitate to destroy forms. If we were to go through libraries burning outmoded books, there would be an immediate cry of "censorship." We have come to accept our drama, our music, our dances, like full grown Minervas, miraculously sired by mysterious Zeuses. Comparatively little attention has been given to their background, evolution and growth, until a very recent date. And without a suitable foundation we should not plunge into a war among schools. We have been solicitous about preserving classical symphonies, but paid too little attention to the dances upon which they were based or which were used along with them.

To understand symphonic development one ought to know something of Lully and the minuet, and the artistic movements known as Baroque and Rococo. Weber and the waltz belong to the age of romanticism, which, in music, did not flourish until the time of Beethoven and later. Waves of tendencies rise and fall, manifest and disappear in the arts. In the twentieth century, the conclusion was reached that both romanticism and classicism had become effete. Ravel and Schoenberg ushered in vast experiments. Music was going everywhere and nowhere at once.

Cyril Scott sought the philosophical reasons for these movements. He studied the metaphysics of art. He preached revolution and practiced synthesis. He would follow in the footsteps of Akbar. But his interest in occultism and theosophy were either misunderstood or else turned people away from him. (This subject is developed further in a projected companion work on music.)

Changes in music have found parallel expression in the dance. The clusters of Cowell and the gong music of Rudhyar may be reflected in new methods of group dancing. But we protest against stilted dynamic geometric patterns which appear so delightful on the screen. They turn performers into automata. Even communistic Russia has not dehumanized the individual dancer so much as Hollywood has. Those who battle fearlessly against gearing man to a machine, say to a belt in an automobile factory, have little to say against group-robot dances. Bear in mind: "Fear not them that torture the body but rather them that torture the soul with hell-fire."

In folk-dance gatherings, in ball rooms and night clubs, couples and groups may perform for pleasure or for beauty or for self-expression, without need for any special ideal. We do not rail against frivolity and we do not expect to obtain from people that for which they have no capacity. The war, the common suffering, and the tremendous problems which confront mankind will help to enhance that seriousness and sobriety which will elevate us all, individually and collectively. We need no warner here; life itself is warning.

Many stage dances have elements of the group-unit which may become the basis of the new aesthetic and new civilization. Dane Rudhyar has been a sort of modern prophet in this respect. He seems gifted with an insight to foretell coming changes in the world of art. The group-unit may have

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the fellow-feeling and attunement that might be expected of members of an orchestra. When there is a common spirit in a troupe, the same psychic currents will touch all. There will be a common zest for life. Group silences and concentrations will prove to be most valuable here, and they are needed if we wish to face the new age with sanity.

Here a question may be asked, must we not first popularize dancing? Yes, and never more than when we are preparing for war, or at least, arming our young men. The U.S.O. is being supported for social and moral reasons; it should be looked upon too as a great aesthetic and spiritual asset to our nation.

The art and music appreciation courses in public schools have done something to awaken ideals and ideas in the young. We must not stop there. We need to avail ourselves of methods now left to private schools of art. For it is not enough to awaken only the practical or "human" qualities. We must foster genius. Just glance at all the attempted suicides among the young! Ask the psychologists how many more have pondered this fatal step. Maybe we should be thankful that we are now arising beyond the period of crass materialism to a broader outlook.

After all, what does the dance do for us? First and foremost, it inculcates the sense of rhythm and enhances our response thereto. This is really a response to life. It makes us more living, which is to say, more spiritual. It brings out beauty of form and movement, and envelops our personalities in the enjoyment thereof. It takes us beyond ourselves, bringing an incipient state of non-being, which is really a balm for the soul. Whether one follows classical, romantic, popular, exotic, Oriental, Occidental, or personal models, there is a modicum of intellectual significance added to the dance therewith, and body, mind and heart can unite.

No doubt we can learn from the Orient and in return can teach Asiatics. If we need anything from India, it is the spirit, particularly that spirit which underlies the sacred dances of that country. We have our peculiar physique, our traditions, our forms. We need abandon nothing. We do not protest against accepted styles. We want to employ everything we can on the pathway toward God-realization.