

INTRODUCTION

Tracing the Light

Let's begin with traces. Traces of the past. Traces of a dance. Traces of light . . . and color and fabric. Traces of a body, animating all these sources of movement. Traces of a life, spent spinning across nations, across centuries, across identities. How do we trace the past? Reconfigure what is lost? Are traces always even visible?

Perhaps we should lose the noun, which renders us nostalgic, maybe even melancholic at the extreme. Replace our ambition to find out what happened with a curiosity about how it came to be that it was happening. Replace traces with tracing—the past with the passion. Tracing the contours of fabric that spiral upward and outward, we spill over beyond any one historical or aesthetic discourse. This act of tracing can help us become aware not only of what's visible, but also what is, has been, will always be, less clearly visible. Beyond the image into the motion.

Long before I became a committed academic, long before I was a college professor teaching dance history, long before terminal degrees and professional titles, I chanced upon an exhibition of early dance photographs at the Rodin Museum in Paris. I bought the small catalog, and from time to time I would page through the striking black-and-white images searching for dancing inspiration. I always paused at a certain picture of Loïe Fuller. There she is, radiant in the sunlight of Rodin's garden, chest open, arms spread like great wings, running full force towards the camera. It is an image of a strong, mature woman, one who exudes a joyful yet earthy energy. A copy of this photograph, taken in 1900 by Eugène Druet, hangs above my desk. Throughout the process of writing this book, I have referred to this photograph, taking in not simply the visual image of this early-twentieth-century Nike of Samothrace, but also its somatic reality. Using my kinesthetic imagination to embody images of Loïe Fuller (sometimes literally, sometimes figuratively) has fueled much of the intellectual work in these pages. It has also given me one of the most satisfying experiences of researching, dancing, and writing that I have had to date in my academic career. It is my hope that some of this pleasure in doing history translates into the reading experience. For, as Gertrude Stein once asserted, "In the midst of writing there is merriment."¹

Figure 1. "Loïe Fuller dansant." Photograph by Eugène Druet. Musée Rodin, Paris

Loïe Fuller is one of the most interesting and paradoxical figures in early modern dance. Born in 1862 in Chicago, Fuller began performing in her teens, first as a temperance speaker and later as a member of the Buffalo Bill troupe, touring America on the vaudeville circuit. Her various dramatic roles included cross-dressed ones, such as the lead in the fast-paced melodrama *Little Jack Sheppard*, but it is as a “serpentine” or skirt dancer that she became well-known. In the 1890s Fuller created an extraordinary sensation in Paris with her manipulations of hundreds of yards of silk, swirling high above her and lit dramatically from below. She embodied the fin-de-siècle images of woman as flower, woman as bird, woman as fire, woman as nature. One of the most famous dancers of her time, Fuller starred as the main act at the Folies Bergère, inspiring a host of contemporary fashions and imitators. Fuller’s serpentine motif is also visible in much of the decorative imagery of Art Nouveau, and she was the subject of many works by such renowned figures as the artists Auguste Rodin and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and the poet Stéphane Mallarmé, among others. Yet despite the importance of her artistic legacy, Fuller’s theatrical work fits uneasily within the dominant narratives of early modern dance. Most historians don’t see Fuller in light of the development of expressive movement, but rather relegate her to discussions concerning dance and lighting, or dance and technology.

With a nod to the meanings embedded in historical study, Walter Benjamin once wrote, “To dwell means to leave traces.”² Indeed, traces are the material artifacts that constitute the stuff of historical inquiry, the bits and pieces of a life that scholars follow, gather up, and survey. The word itself suggests the actual imprint of a figure that has passed, the footprint, mark, or impression of a person or event. These kinds of traces are omnipresent in the case of Loïe Fuller. Some traces are more visible than others, some more easily located. But all traces—once noticed—draw us into another reality. *Someone passed this way before.*

I had been thinking about writing a book on Loïe Fuller for some time, but it took me a while to come to terms with how I wanted to respond to the less visible traces of her work. My book project began with a question: why do so many critics and historians dismiss the bodily experience of her dancing in their discussions of Loïe Fuller’s theatrical work? The question grew into a dance. The dance, in turn, taught me how to write history from inside the vibrations of its ongoing motion. This book carries the story of an intellectual approach to the past that not only recognizes the corporeal effects of the historian’s vantage point, but also mobilizes her body within the process of research and writing. It is the story of a dance shared across a century of time and two continents, a dance that takes place at the meeting point of physical empathy and historical difference.

I am engaged in writing on Loïe Fuller. I use this term engaged very consciously, for I want to highlight both the sense of binding oneself to another person and the word’s etymological meaning as “interlocking,” a literal as well as a figurative meshing with someone or something. I have chosen to work on this book in a way that integrates conceptual and somatic knowledges, engaging my physical as well as

my intellectual and analytic facilities. Dancing amidst clouds of fabric in elaborate lighting effects, I try to understand something of Fuller’s experience from the inside out. I also dance with words, moving with my writing to see how ideas resonate in my body. Then too, as I weave my way through archival materials and historical accounts of cultural milieus, I practice staying attentive to what I have learned through that dancing experience. This research process challenges traditional separations between academic scholarship and artistic creation, between criticism and autobiography—in short, between dancing and writing. More than just another layer of historical excavation, my dancing creates a strand of physical thinking that weaves back and forth between the presence of historical artifacts (posters, reviews, photos, memoirs, and paintings) and the absence of Fuller’s physical motion.

This introduction is an attempt to articulate the theoretical implications of my embodied approach to this book, an attempt to understand the very conditions of its possibilities. In what follows, I identify two strategies—two practices, if you will—that guide my scholarship on Loïe Fuller. While one is primarily intellectual and the other is based in physical study, both practices refuse the conventional separation of scholarship and the studio, folding themselves into a mix of dancing and writing that houses a certain physical receptiveness at its core. These strands of embodied study create a textured fabric in which aspects of Fuller’s work are made visible through my body as well as my writing.

In all writing, a body is traced, is the tracing and the trace—is the letter, yet never the letter, a literality or rather a lettericity that is no longer legible. A body is what cannot be read in a writing.

(Or one has to understand reading as something other than decipherment. Rather, as touching, as being touched. Writing, reading: matters of tact.)³

Despite its linguistic unwieldiness (an effect, no doubt, of the difficulties of translation), this quotation from Jean-Luc Nancy’s “Corpus” signals what is for me a profound difference in my current approach to historical work from that of others. Moving from traces to tracing incorporates the tactile and thereby refuses the traditional separation of object from subject. Reaching across time and space to touch Fuller’s dancing means that I allow myself, in turn, to be touched, for it is impossible to touch anything in a way that does not also implicate one’s own body. (Ask any kid who has just been burned.) Touching, then, becomes the space of our interaction, a mutual engagement. As I touch Loïe Fuller through my historical research, both textual and physical, I am touched in return.

This metaphysical conundrum—how is one touched by history?—has, in my case, a very physical complement. Much of my dance experience over the past two decades has been generated by a form of contemporary dance called contact improvisation. In contact, the actual point of contact (defined, usually, in terms of physical touching, although it can be defined as rhythmic, visual, or kinesthetic

touching) creates an improvisational space in which assumptions as to what the dance will be like (future tense) are eschewed in favor of a curiosity about what is happening now (present tense). The meeting point of contact creates an interconnectedness of weight, momentum, and energy that channels a common physical destiny. The partnering in contact is not simply an addition of one movement to another, but rather a realization that both movements will change in the midst of the improvisational duet. In addition to learning how to meet others in a dance, contact dancers train in extreme spatial disorientation. Releasing the uprightness of the body and learning how to be comfortable upside down, rolling and spiraling in and out of the floor, falling without fear—these are all aspects of a training that redirects visual orientation into a kinesthetic grounding.

In a variety of ways, I think of the physical aspects of my research on Fuller in terms of a contact duet. My body is influenced by her dancing as I imagine how she must have used her spine, her head, her chest. Suddenly, historical descriptions of Fuller laid up in bed with excruciating pain and ice packs on her upper back make sense to me. Spinning with my arms raised high and my head thrown back, I realize that Fuller must have slipped a disc in her cervical spine. These kinds of biographical details begin to make sense as I literally incorporate some aspects of the physical tolls her nightly performances must have incurred. Even on an intellectual or metaphysical level, I think of our interaction as a contact duet, a somatic meeting set up by the traces of history. I believe that envisioning this relation in terms of an improvisational duet usefully redefines the traditional separation of a historical subject (treated as the “object” of study) and the omniscient writer of history. When, for instance, I review the enormous variety of images of “La Loïe”—the posters, photographs, paintings, prints, and program covers—I try not only to analyze the visual representation of her work, but also to imagine the kind of dancing that inspired such visions. That is to say, I allow myself to be touched (these “matters of tact”) by what remains only partially visible.

In her introduction to *Choreographing History*, Susan Foster also sees the interaction of historian and the bodies of history as a dynamic tango between traces and tracing, between artifacts and the language that reanimates their cultural significance. Her notion of “bodily theotics” engages with similar metaphors of writing history as a tactile duet, an improvisational connection between past and present bodies. But, she reminds us:

This affiliation, based on a kind of kinesthetic empathy between living and dead but imagined bodies, enjoys no primal status outside the world of writing. It possesses no organic authority; it offers no ultimate validation for sentiment. But it is redolent with physical vitality and embraces a concern for beings that live and have lived. Once the historian’s body recognizes value and meaning in kinesthesia, it cannot dis-animate the physical action of past bodies it has begun to sense.⁴

Loïe Fuller’s work embodies a central paradox of dance as a representation of both abstract movement and a physical body. Her dancing epitomizes the intriguing insubstantiality of movement caught in the process of tracing itself. Surrounded by a funnel of swirling fabric spiraling upward into the space around her and bathed in colored lights of her own invention, Fuller’s body seems to evaporate in the midst of her spectacle. Nonetheless, Fuller’s body is undeniably present, and discussions of her sartorial style and physical girth break through these romantic representations of her ethereality and femininity in interesting ways. Splayed across history and geography, Fuller’s dancing takes place at the crossroads of diverse languages, two centuries, and many cultural changes.

Intellectually, the material is fascinating. But there is something even more compelling for me in this subject. It’s a gut thing. I feel that many scholars cover over the kinesthetic and material experience of Fuller’s body in favor of the image, rather than reading that image as an extension of her dancing. Descriptions of her work get so entangled with artistic images or poetic renderings that they easily forget the physical labor involved. Then too, there are all those apologies and side notes about how Loïe Fuller didn’t have a dancer’s body, or any dance training really, as if the movement images were solely dependent on the lighting, as if it were all technologically rendered. (One typical example: “The influence of Loïe Fuller upon the theater will always be felt, particularly in the lighting of the scene and in the disposition of draperies. *But she was never a great dancer. She was an apparition*” [emphasis added].)⁵ There is an odd urgency in my responses to these commentaries: my whole body revolts with the kinesthetic knowledge that something else was going on. *My body tells me this.*

In 1990 I made a dance called *Traces of Light*. It was the first time I incorporated light as a source of movement and stillness within the choreography, the first time I experienced what it was like to dance in, with, through, and next to light. The following year I traced another dance that used light as a partner for movement. I recreated Loïe Fuller’s dance “Le lys” (1895), or, at least something approximating it. It was part of an evening-length choreographic work, and although we meticulously reconstructed Fuller’s patented design for costume and curved wands, I thought about this dance not as a historical reconstruction, but rather as more of an interesting effect plundered from the abundant resources of early modern dance. Because of budget constraints, we used parachute material, not silk. Purple, not white.

I remember the first time I danced in her costume. It felt odd to be cloaked in yards of fabric, me, who was so used to dancing in pants and a top, with nothing in my way, every movement and each direction easily accessible. Within her costume, I have to prepare each step in order not to trip on the extra fabric. Twisting first to one side, then to the other, I gather my strength and then launch the spiral, catching the air underneath the fabric and opening my arms and reaching towards the sky. Two minutes later, I collapse, exhausted and dizzy. I am awed by the upper-body strength and aerobic stamina Fuller must have had to keep the fabric aloft and swirling for up to forty-five minutes a night. How odd that some historians insist that

she wasn't a dancer.⁶ Was it that she didn't look like a dancer? That she didn't act the way they thought a dancer should? Clearly she had a trained body and specific movement techniques in her body. In order to make a mere twelve-minute solo with much less fabric than she used, I had to train intensively in my upper body for several months. *In motion, my body talks back to historical representation and teaches me to look again, to read beyond the visual evidence and into its source.* Ironically, then, where others savored the image of her disappearance (into the dark, into the folds of cloth, into the ideal symbol), I have come to appreciate the dynamic of her vital presence, those moments of becoming, and becoming again.

In the ensuing decade I returned to the costume and her dancing each time I taught early-twentieth-century dance history. Taking history from the classroom to the studio, my students would try on Fuller's costume. But nothing happens until you begin to move and spin. Some students would get caught up in Fuller's whirl, the mystique of her dancing. Their enthusiasm inspired me. Eventually I became aware of a need to write on Fuller. Part physical, part intellectual, this desire was fueled by the intriguing complexities of a cultural moment in which a short, stocky lesbian from Chicago arrives in Paris to inspire a famous poet's evocation of the dancer as at once feminized and yet also decorporealized into a vision of pure movement. I began to conceive of this twisted relationship between dance and image as a Möbius strip, one in which the interconnectedness of figure and body would never entirely line up, but always exist just across the fold.

What is so fascinating for me about dance as a historical phenomenon is the many different kinds of layers and information we need to excavate in order to understand that kinetic and artistic experience. What constitutes the dance as staged in Western theaters? Is it the movement? The dancers embodying the movement? The narrative plot or libretto? The entire theatrical apparatus, including sets, costumes, music, choreographer, technicians, and company managers? The social and cultural context in which it was created? All of the above? In other words, what do we need in order to know the dancer and the dance?

In the introduction to their collection of essays *Acting on the Past*, Mark Franko and Annette Richards describe this process of culling many different kinds of historical sources: "Absent performative events have conceptual, imaginary, and evidential, as well as actively reproductive bases. They are especially characterized by movement between present and past, one in which archive and act, fragment and body, text and sounding, subject and practice, work in provocative interaction."⁷

I see my work as taking place in the midst of this "provocative interaction"—right at the imaginative intersection of the past and the present. I visualize this (double) crossing spatially, marked in the center of a vast, cavernous space—much like the old wooden dance studio where I teach and work. At one end is the stage of the Folies Bergère. My view is from backstage, with all the workings of its magical effects revealed. Programs, posters, and images of Loïe Fuller, as well as pages from her autobiography and countless other articles about her, dot the floor, creating a

historical landscape and defining various pathways through the space. I improvise my way through these artifacts to the opposite end of the room, where I also envision a backstage. This time, however, it is backstage of the theater where I work. There is a new Plexiglas floor in the middle, underneath which we will project lights in multiple colors, reinventing Fuller's lighting designs within a contemporary context. It is the motion between these two backstage spaces (one in the past, the other in the present) as well as the dancing pathways I construct from source to source that inform my research methodology.

A major attraction in Paris at the end of the nineteenth century, Fuller left her mark on the imaginations of many poets and artists of her time. My scholar's cubicle in the library is filled with images of Fuller's dancing: posters, sculptures, photographs, articles about her. How do I respond to these traces? Looking at the reproductions, reading texts, I am fascinated—and moved. What would happen if I took these images, these ideas, into the studio? *I grab my notebook and sprint out of the library.* Inspired to move as well as to write, I take the plunge back into the physical, using my body both as a point of departure and as a moving vehicle, a method of transportation into history.

In an early essay entitled "Rereading as a Woman: The Body in Practice," the feminist scholar Nancy Miller discusses the ways in which readings of literary texts are very much affected by the cultural experience of the reader. She writes: "To reread as a woman is at least to imagine the lady's place; to imagine while reading the place of a woman's body; to read reminded that her identity is also re-membered in stories of the body."⁸ My studies in feminist theory, inspired by the work of scholars such as Nancy Miller, have taught me to be aware of how I produce a double reading—as a scholar, as a woman. These days, I am challenging myself to push the implications of Miller's essay even further, that is to say, to read (and, by extension, to write) as a dancer, allowing my body to be present even in the midst of a scholarly project.

Because I have decided to posit my dancing body as a research tool or guide (perhaps assistant is a more apt expression, for my body certainly has a mind of its own and doesn't always follow my instructions), I feel compelled to grapple with the relationship of my body to history. In the dance field, there often seems to be a split between researchers who focus primarily on reconstructing a dance from the past on bodies from the present and those scholars who use dance as the hook into a broader cultural study of modes of production, representation, and reception of artistic endeavors. Of course, we all might quickly assert that we do both, but it is rare that I read an essay in which I feel that the writer's bodily knowledge was a crucial part of the scholarly process. Indeed, although *theoretically* we might be interested and excited by the possibilities of a dialogue between the dancing body of the researcher and that of the subject they are researching, we are rarely willing to confront that methodologically murky territory for ourselves. With this work on Loïe Fuller, I am asking what it would mean to research a historical body, a dancing

body, a desiring body precisely through the intertext of an “other” body—my own. How can I use my embodied knowledge to move beyond the traces of artistic and literary representations of Fuller’s dancing into the physicality at their core?

Over the past few years, I have developed a series of solo performances inspired by my work on Loïe Fuller. These dances take place at the intersection of historical research and choreographic expression. Although they do delineate a movement vocabulary that references Fuller’s work, these choreographies are not reconstructions of her works. Spinning, spirals circling out of the upper body, and large expansive gestures of the arms with an upward gaze of the face—these motifs constitute much of the dancing. My first solo, “Searching for Loïe,” was a structured improvisation that used my earliest writings on Fuller as a sound score. Playing with the juxtaposition of poetic and expository prose, the read text created an open field (semi-serious, semi-playful) in which to explore my physical response to Fuller’s historical legacy. Later, the dance morphed into a performative lecture entitled “Acts of Passion: Tracing History through the Body.” In this more recent incarnation, I interrupt an academic discussion with dancing that pairs my movement with slide images of Fuller’s dancing. Moving back and forth across the stage, my body interrupts the projections, flashing my shadow onto the screen. In these moments, Fuller’s image is joined by my image, creating a complex duet involving interpretation, interconnection, and reflection. Bringing myself into the dancing in this manner forces me to reflect on my own intellectual position and physical experience as I ask myself, “So what does this embodied experience tell me about history?” My answers to this question encompass both specific details about her movement, staging, and lighting techniques and a more general sense of her performance energy and the role light played within Fuller’s own personal cosmology.

Loïe Fuller thought of her theater spaces as laboratories in which to combine lights and movement in increasingly sophisticated ways. Fortunately, I have a wonderful collaborator and lighting designer in my colleague Jen Groseth, who also became quite interested in Loïe Fuller’s work and legacy. One year our university situation gave us the luxury of a significant amount of time to spend experimenting with lighting in the theater, creating the lights and movement both simultaneously and interactively. Although we were not attempting to reconstruct her dances *per se*, we did use Fuller’s original design patents and depictions of her staging (with live lighting technicians above, below, and to the sides of her specially raised platform) to inform our updated use of her lighting inventions. For instance, we created a floor out of Plexiglas, with intelligent lights revolving above and below its surface. The result was a twelve-minute performance entitled “Dancing with Light.”

Collaborating with a lighting designer for days on end brought me closer, I believe, to the reality of Fuller’s working environment. Not only did I begin to understand the physical labor involved, I understood why she is always pictured wearing shoes (the stage floors of variety theaters being notoriously dirty and riddled with nails and bits of this and that). I also realized that the reason she never mentions using haze to intensify the rays of light (an effect every critic comments on) was

because the theaters were already so dusty and smoky, one didn’t need any additional stuff in the air. It seems so simple and obvious, but the physical experience of making a dance in the middle of a busy theater jerked me out of the modern-dance paradigm of solo artist working alone in the studio, waiting for inspiration, and brought me headlong into the gritty realities of popular theater. Although it is true that at the beginning of her career, Loïe Fuller was mostly known as a soloist, she never performed anything without the committed assistance of a whole crew of technicians. Both an artist and a craftsperson in the theater, she transcended a deep and still omnipresent division between artists and technicians, directors and stage hands, dancers and electricians.

One of the most important aspects of “Dancing with Light,” for me, was a new appreciation of the experience of moving in strongly defined lights. Unlike lighting whose sole purpose is to illuminate the dancers, the lighting we created was an equal partner in the dance. Sometimes the light obscured me, sometimes it revealed my dancing, and sometimes I was simply a screen onto which a variety of moving lights were projected. At various times I felt sheltered and enclosed, inspired, even disoriented (especially when dancing on clear glass with lights shining from underneath). The palpable presence of these lights reminded me of otherworldly spirits.

Returning to my study, I began to understand more concretely the spiritual role that light played for Loïe Fuller. I believe that Fuller experienced a certain kind of euphoria when dancing that was intensified by her dramatic approach to lighting. Her dances generally followed a classic creation narrative. They began in a total blackout (highly unusual for that time), with the first strands of music calling forth a dim illumination of the small motions of her hands and fabric. The lights, movements, and music would generally crescendo into a final frenzy of color and motion that faded abruptly back into a primordial darkness. The idea that light had spiritual overtones for Fuller is confirmed by her own writing—both her published autobiography and unpublished letters and fragments of a book she was writing later in her life. Although I don’t always know what to make of this visionary aspect of Fuller’s work and life, I do know that I would never have understood its significance without having danced in a light so defined, I could pierce it with my body.

In her essay “The Concept of Intertextuality and Its Application in Dance Research,” Janet Ashead-Lansdale identifies the imaginative possibilities of an approach to dance research that resonates with my own:

These methodological shifts of position are sometimes in harmony and often not, but they can be tolerated and made to function by seeing that it is in the spaces created between a multiplicity of texts and traces [that] there is the opportunity, indeed, more strongly, the demand, that each reader should engage in this process of constructing meaning by unraveling what seems to be implied by the work, or the method, or the discipline, while simultaneously creating their own threads from their own experience.⁹

This layering of texts forms a web of signifying practices that merge and emerge depending upon the historical or methodological lens one chooses to use. Yet these intertexts can also produce a misleading sense that we have captured the thing itself—the *presence* of a dancing body.

I want to introduce the concept of intertextuality, not in order simply to add another historical layer or methodological option, but rather to point out the space between these texts. Although this space may figure as an absence, it is not necessarily a loss. Rather, I see it as a distance (both historical and cultural) across which desire always pulls interpretation. At once opportunity and demand (which I sometimes experience as an internal command, an urgency that compels action or speaks to a particular direction of thought), this intertextuality marks the space of improvisation possible within historical work. It recognizes the gap between myself and the subject of my inquiry—that historical distance—while simultaneously foregrounding the desire to close that gap, to build bridges and cross over from one period to another. Not every subject would necessarily elicit such mobile strategies. But given the elusive quality of Fuller’s work and reception in combination with the unpredictable edge of my physical commitment to exploring her dances, this methodological fluidity seems right at the moment.

Writing a scholarly book on Loïe Fuller while making a series of dances incorporating aspects of her oeuvre opens up an intertextual space that can become the site of a negotiation between past and present bodies, between history and desire. More than a poststructuralist ploy (one in which movement is simply a slippery strategy of evasive criticism), however, this approach stretches the seams of traditional historical inquiry. My research uses these subjective perspectives as points of entry to a variety of intellectual trends and physical experiences critical to understanding the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century.

Although at times I have been daunted by its complexity, Loïe Fuller’s work reflects many of the key social and aesthetic issues embedded in this shift into a modern, industrial, and increasingly global world. Documenting the creation and reception of Fuller’s choreography has led me to grapple with a plethora of intriguing contradictions: Fuller was one of the most famous dancers of her time, but was later marginalized by modern dance history. Her dancing evoked visions of mature, yet her spectacles were renowned for their elaborate use of electrical lighting and theatrical artifice. She was lauded as the epitome of the symbolist ideal (ethereal, mysterious, poetic), yet she was also embraced by the futurists as an industrial engineer of the theater. Fuller was seen by her public as quintessentially American, yet she lived most of her adult life in Paris and was always associated with the particularly French style of art nouveau. She was celebrated by the most important artists, scientists, and literary figures of her time, yet she performed mostly in working-class venues and music halls. These are just a few of the many contradictions that animate the intellectual trajectory of this book.

The six chapters here progress from solo dancing to group choreography, from discussions of Fuller’s physical technique to analysis of her staged produc-

tions, and finally to explorations of her work within the larger milieus of early-twentieth-century theater and film. Chapter 1, “Serpentine Signatures: Inscription and Representation in Loïe Fuller’s Early Dances,” traces the creation and reception of Fuller’s wildly successful serpentine dance. I discuss the development of her physical technique and explore how she led the audience to focus on the motion of her draperies instead of the pose at the end of a musical phrase. I also look at the strategies she used to create a recognizable signature, even though she was unable to copyright her dances. Finally, I take up Stéphane Mallarmé’s evocations of her dancing, including his reading of her dancing as a hieroglyph-like script, to talk about dancing as writing.

The second chapter, “Becoming Light: Engaging the Dynamics of Color and Space,” analyzes the elements of light, space, and color at work in Fuller’s spectacles. I argue that Fuller engaged the expressive possibilities of electricity by dancing with, instead of merely in the middle of, her theatrical lighting. Finally, I look at one of her most famous dances, “Fire Dance,” to articulate how Fuller’s dancing staged a “dramaturgy of darkness,” using light to create an emotional narrative even in the midst of ever changing patterns and abstract design.

Chapter 3, “Born in America, Made in Paris: Loïe Fuller and the Exposition Universelle of 1900,” focuses on Fuller’s involvement in this world’s fair in Paris and on her image as the poster child of art nouveau. Here, I utilize Patrice Higonnet’s concept of phantasmagoria to develop a trajectory of Fuller’s work as it moves from nineteenth-century spectacle to twentieth-century trope. The chapter reflects on how the complicated networks of nationalism, aesthetic ideology, and global marketing involved in this extravagant festival had an impact on the reception and future directions of Fuller’s career, in terms of her work both as an artist and as a director and producer.

Chapter 4, “Femininity with a Vengeance: Strategies of Veiling and Unveiling in Loïe Fuller’s Performances of *Salomé*,” compares Fuller’s 1895 and 1907 performances of *Salomé*, works that have been given little sustained critical attention. Dance historians writing on Fuller’s career tend to focus on the innovations of her serpentine dance, rarely considering her *Salomé* performances except as precursors to Fuller’s famous “Fire Dance.” Many critics consider these two “lyric pantomimes,” in which Fuller returns to her melodramatic roots, artistic failures. Certainly the critical reception was mixed, and some of Fuller’s most avid supporters panned her 1895 version of the *Salomé* legend. But when placed in the cultural frame of fin-de-siècle Salomania, Fuller’s two productions of *Salomé* reveal intriguing feminist approaches to this infamous femme fatale. By staging herself as this hypersexualized decadent icon, Fuller was, I argue, resisting the conventional reading of her dancing as “chaste.”

The fifth chapter, “Staging the Self: Expressive Bodies and Autobiographical Acts,” places Fuller alongside three other well-known women acting and dancing in Paris during the early years of the twentieth century. I compare the performance work of Colette, Eva Palmer, and Isadora Duncan with the group choreography of

Fuller's later career, analyzing how all four women challenged nineteenth-century gendered hierarchies to stage and then write about their visions of the "new" woman. Despite their very different interests and aesthetics, these four women were connected by their belief that women's bodies could be agents of self-expression and by an equally fervent desire to share their ideas in autobiographical writings that doubled as aesthetic and social manifestos.

My final chapter, "Resurrecting the Future: Body, Image and Technology," addresses the integration of dance and technology (the body and machine) throughout Fuller's long, multifaceted career. Beginning with her original patents of the 1890s and ending with the avant-garde legacy of her 1921 film *Le lys de la vie*, I argue that unlike many modern dancers who set their dancing in opposition to modern machinery, Fuller was able to conceive of technology as a way to connect to her body, a way to highlight, rather than hide, the physical expressivity of her movement. Developing some of the theoretical discussions that arose during the 2006 Screendance conference at the American Dance Festival, I draw some parallels between Fuller's later group dance spectacles (her use of shadows, images projected on a large backdrop, etc.) and more recent adventures of dance on screens. Reviewing how critics wrote about Fuller's absence of body and presence of figure at the beginning of the twentieth century can be an enlightening introduction to discussions of mediated dance at the beginning of the twenty-first century. I use the contemporary example of *Ghostcatching*, the digital dance collaboration between Bill T. Jones, Paul Kaiser, and Shelley Eshkar, to articulate how both Fuller's work and this more recent exploration of virtual dancing can teach us to see movement with a more active, kinesthetic perception. At the core of this discussion lies the complex relationship between physical expression and visual abstraction, between body and image in dance.

Loïe Fuller has fascinated me for a long time now. I offer *Traces of Light: Absence and Presence in the work of Loïe Fuller* as one dancer-scholar's critical reflections on her choreographic oeuvre and artistic legacy. I point out this obvious fact because I am deeply and humbly aware of the paucity of book-length studies on Fuller. With the exception of Lista's work in French, the Currents' book in English, and several exhibition catalogs, there are few works devoted entirely to investigating Fuller's dancing. Fortunately, there are many shorter pieces, including several interesting essays and smart chapters in books, that explore different aspects of Fuller's performances as well as her role in the fin-de-siècle Parisian environment. In particular, I was inspired by the interdisciplinary scholarship of Rhonda Garelick, Felicia McCarren, and Julie Ann Townsend, and by the writing of the dance scholars Sally Sommer, Jody Sperling, and Amy Koritz.

In France, where I wrote most of the second half of this book, servers in restaurants wish you "Bon appétit" at the beginning of a meal. Because most French dinners extend through multiple courses, however, they often wish their guests "Bonne continuation" as they serve the next dish. I am amused by thinking of this

study as one course within a feast of work on Loïe Fuller. My appetite was whetted by other scholars' contributions. I have prepared a main course for people to digest, but I also look forward to the next course that someone else will create. My hope is that rather than being the definitive study, this book will inspire others to write about Loïe Fuller. *Bonne continuation!*