FOUR

Authentic Themes: Modern Dancers and American Indians in the 1920s and 1930s

> The function of the artist is to use authentic themes, as seeds from which to produce an art creation of his own.
>
> ▸ *Ted Shawn,* The American Ballet

Early modern dance choreographers were outraged by the federal circulars seeking to curtail Native American dance. Ted Shawn, after reading Commissioner of Indian Affairs Charles Burke's 1923 "TO ALL INDIANS" letter, wrote:

> There has been no governmental recognition of the art of dance as being worth preserving or recording. On the contrary, the bureaucratic mind being what it is, the dancing of the Indians is looked upon as degrading, morally and industrially, and veiled threats in the form of letters from the Indian Commissioner, one of which I have read, indicate an official intention to blot out such remnants as still exist. This is nothing short of a great artistic crime. The art of the dance is the fundamental art of the human race, and it is of greater importance that we preserve and record the authentic dances of the Indians now alive than that we preserve all their other arts. (*American Ballet,* 15–16)

Shawn explains that Indian dance ought to be preserved "Now that the Indian as a physical menace is hardly more than a memory of our grandparents" (15). He adds, "This, surely, is one great charge laid upon the American dancers—to study, record and translate the dance art of the Indian to present and future generations" (20).

Shawn's and other modern dance choreographers' championing of Native American dance came at a time when other dance enthusiasts still dismissed

it as savage and degenerate.[1] Their opposition directly challenged both that viewpoint and government policy that sought to restrict Native American ceremonial dance practices as wasteful and degrading. It also supported their own passions and interests as modern dancers.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the interest of Shawn and other modern dancers in American Indian dance blossomed, in particular, in relation to increasingly available American Indian dance in the Southwest. Dancers and choreographers, including Shawn and Martha Graham, visited the area and the arts colonies at Taos and Santa Fe and traveled to the pueblos on feast days to watch ceremonial dances. Arrell Morgan Gibson writes how "dancers studied Pueblo terpsichorean routines in search of fresh, innovative motions, rhythms, beats, and style to add to their dance repertoire."[2] He adds that "The mysticism and symbolism of Native American dance fascinated many of the observers, particularly the explanation that the Indian dance rhythm follows the beat of the human heart" (*Sante Fe and Taos Colonies,* 97). As Southwest Indian dance came to signal an invented authentic, but disappearing, Indianness for tourists, artists, and intellectuals, it fascinated and inspired choreographers.

For example, in 1914 Shawn toured as a dancer at station stops along the Santa Fe Railroad, where he came into contact with Native Americans. That same year, he staged himself as an Aztec youth in a narrative he'd researched by reading William Prescott's *The History of the Conquest of Mexico* and auditioned for Ruth St. Denis's company.[3] A year later, Shawn and St. Denis formed Denishawn, considered a cornerstone of American modern dance history. In 1917, Shawn premiered *Invocation to the Thunderbird,* which remained in his solo repertoire until the early 1950s. As scholar Jane Sherman has outlined, Shawn's interest in American Indian dance material continued for years and infused his entire career ("American Indian Imagery," 369). Shawn described how his second ballet, the 1923 *Feather of the Dawn,* was based on versions of eight different Hopi rituals, which he performed wearing "costumes" purchased from the Indians. In January 1924, he saw "a real and complete dance ceremony, in the pueblo of Isleta" (*American Ballet,* 16). When Shawn formed his company of Men Dancers in the 1930s, the "Indian" material he'd developed via his viewings in the Southwest opened the program. In 1931, on his first tour on his own, the program included his solo "Zuni Ghost Dance" and the piece "Osage-Pawnee Dance of Greeting."[4]

Martha Graham was likewise entranced by Native American dance in the Southwest and, like Shawn, engaged with it at the start of her career. In 1930, while driving back to the East Coast after performing in California, she came across the Penitente Indians of New Mexico. Inspired by their religious practices, she premiered *Primitive Mysteries* in 1931. A year later she received a Guggenheim fellowship that financed a summer spent watching Native Ameri-

can dances of the Southwest. That summer, as writer Mary Austin's guest, she was presented to Santa Fe and Taos colony members and taken to observe the Santo Domingo Pueblo Corn Dance where, Gibson writes, she was "awed at the powerful nativistic spectacle" (*Santa Fe and Taos Colonies,* 97).

Watching Southwest Indian dance inspired Erick Hawkins at the start of his career as well. He writes how in the mid-thirties he took a summer off from dancing and drove around the Southwest "ferreting out work of every dance given that summer in New Mexico and Arizona."[5] He saw Corn Dances at Zia Pueblo, a two-day Zuni Rain Dance ritual, and dances at the Hopi village of Mishongnovi. A number of his later pieces work to translate his experiences to the modern dance stage, including *Plains Daybreak, Ritual of the Descent, Black Lake,* and *Killer of Enemies.*

A lifelong fascination with American Indian culture and dance also infused Lester Horton's choreography from this early period on. He began his career working with Indian material, staging "Indian" pageants, starring himself and his dancers as Indians. Horton's major theatrical debut, in 1926, was in *The Song of Hiawatha,* a pageant based on Henry W. Longfellow's 1855 epic fantasy of Indian assimilation and disappearance. Moving from Indiana to California, he performed in and directed this pageant throughout the state in 1928 and 1929 and later directed high school pageants on Indian themes. In 1931, he presented *Kootenai War Dance (American Indian)* at the Argus Bowl and in 1932 *Takwish, the Star Maker,* based on California Indian folklore, at the Little Theater of the Verdugos near Los Angeles, where he also presented various "Pueblo Indian" dances. A program for the July 7, 1933, Horton and Dance Group performance at this venue lists a "Pueblo Indian" section including a *Corn Dance, Hoop Dance, Eagle Dance, Devil Dance* (danced by Horton), and *War Dance.*[6] In 1934 he used music by Homer Grunn—who had done the music for Shawn's *Xochitl*—in his *Painted Desert,* and in 1935 his *Mound Builders* and *Rain Quest* reprised Indigenous themes.[7] When Horton regrouped his dance theater company in 1948, he opened the program with *Totem Incantation,* a "dance based upon coming of age ceremonies among North American Indian groups."[8]

This chapter analyzes this groundswell of U.S. choreographers' fascination with Native American dance in the context of federal Indian policies of the 1920s and 1930s. On the one hand, these modern dancers provided important political resistance to blatantly racist federal circulars. Yet at the same time, they also subtly reinforced the circulars' focus on "waste" and "use" by themselves arguing for Native American dance's use-value, to them and to America, as art. This approach, the chapter suggests, is linked to passage of the American Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1935. Just as legislating the importance of American Indian art reinforced Native American dance's value, and availability, primarily to individual non–Native American collectors, rather than focusing on it as

religious, ceremonial, or healing practice for Native peoples, so too did Indian-inspired choreography primarily (though not entirely) reinforce its value outside of Native American communities. To explore the possibilities, and the problems, in the interest of early modern dancers in Native American dance, this chapter focuses on the approaches of both Ted Shawn and Lester Horton in depth. It analyzes Shawn's use of the "full-blooded masculine vigour" associated with Indian dancing, examining how he staged himself and his Men Dancers as Indians in shortened versions of the Indian dances he'd seen as a way of negotiating issues of masculinity and sexuality in an art form that faced charges of effeminacy. Despite his respect for and interest in Native American culture, he removed those dances from the physical, spiritual, and legal contexts in which they are practiced, and made use of them as source of artistic fodder in "Indian" dance pieces expressing what he saw as "natural" internal characteristics of masculinity, in keeping with Delsarte's Christian-based philosophy of movement as expression of inner truth. His career, in turn, has come to be read as central to the history of modern dance in America. Lester Horton's productions and practices also drew on his ideas about American Indian dance culture, and reflect some similar problems. Unlike Shawn, however, Horton worked firsthand with Native people and explored Native dance more in terms of what it has to offer theater process and practice than as material for accessing individual expression or agendas. Like radical and leftist dance makers also working more to affect political change than to express interiority, as more strictly modernist modern dancers of the era were doing, Horton today hardly figures in dominant understandings of modern dance history.

AMERICANIZING DANCE AND AMERICAN INDIAN CITIZENSHIP

In one way, the impulse to preserve American Indian dance seen in Shawn's outrage at Burke's letter repeated rhetoric prevalent from before the turn of the nineteenth century. In his 1929 *Gods Who Dance,* Shawn wrote, "With the mechanical device of the motion picture so marvelously adapted to preserving a record of human movement, there is now no excuse for us not to preserve the dances of all these fast vanishing tribes of our own."[9] By reiterating descriptions of "fast vanishing tribes" and "our" mandate to preserve them, and in calling for artists to "preserve and record the authentic dances of the Indians now alive," Shawn, like numerous other American officials, scholars, artists, and intellectuals, reinforces an (inadvertently wishful?) idea that Native peoples are, indeed, on the verge of extinction. Horton, too, argued for implicitly non-Native dancers to preserve American Indian dance. In a 1929 article on "American Indian Dancing," Horton writes, "If dancers would make an effort, to preserve this beauty which exists literally at our back doors, something magnificent

might be born. A dance can be built upon these art forms that would be truly representative of this great country, something new and fundamental."[10]

Shawn's and Horton's moves to claim the "Indian" as "truly representative" and authentically Americanizing also took part in a shift in the twenties and thirties toward seeing Indians as validating and consolidating America through their identities as original Americans. The explicit goal of Shawn and other dancers of the era, as the title to Shawn's 1926 *The American Ballet* indicates—and as Julia L. Foulkes has recently discussed—was to validate a distinctly American dance tradition.[11] In this book, Shawn calls for an American dance tradition distinct from the ballet traditions of Russia and France, and outlines his interest in American Indian dance as an American dance form. As literary scholar Walter Benn Michaels notes, this move to see Indians as intrinsically American was characteristic of the era.[12] Rather than simply mourned as disappeared, here the Indian was instead heralded as sign of and figure for a distinct American culture, albeit one, as in the previous century, still disappearing—this time through Indians' assimilation into American citizenry. This rhetorical and legal identification with the Indian *as* American culminated in 1924 with passage of the Indian Citizenship Act, in which Native peoples were given (or imposed with) U.S. citizenship.[13] In the context of Native American history, of course, a heralding of America and a desire to consolidate American identity itself served to affirm and consolidate the successful colonization of Indigenous people and land. Shawn's and Horton's acts of "dancing Indian" were also part of an American tradition of consolidating power and identity by "playing Indian," as Deloria has persuasively demonstrated.

IGNORING ALL HINTS: PRIVILEGE AND PRESUMPTIONS ABOUT RIGHTS TO KNOWLEDGE

Behind modern dancers' interest in Native arts and dances lay assumptions about non–Native Americans' right to knowledge about Indian peoples and cultures, assumptions performed particularly dramatically at this time in relation to the Southwest. The artistic and touristic practices of the 1920s and 1930s implied not only that Southwest landscape and scenery, but also Indian peoples and practices, were available to viewers in a primarily visual capitalist economy.[14] The call for the recording and preservation of Indian dance was connected to its availability to non-Indian enthusiasts, and to its use to artists, for the edification and entertainment of, primarily, non-Indian peoples. And the call for its role as artistic inspiration, fodder for dance and other artists' creative endeavors, was connected to this belief in its availability to all. This belief was itself rooted in Christianity's assumptions about the importance of "spreading the word" about its own religious perspectives as widely as possible, and in the privilege white

Americans have historically asserted in insistently learning about and embodying others.

These beliefs fueled and were fueled by longstanding tourist and ethnographic practices of intrusive looking and recording. In his 1884 book on the Snake Dance, John G. Bourke explains how he feigned ignorance and "quietly ignored all hints" that he leave a ceremony (*Snake Dance of the Moquis,* 149). Erna Fergusson, in her 1931 book on Indian Ceremonials of New Mexico and Arizona, tells how she got around the "deep impenetrable veil falling behind [the eyes of an Indian friend of hers]" when she asked when the Parrot-dance would be happening by promising to bring presents for his family.[15]

Shawn's focus on and reproduction of the Hopi village of Walpi in *The Feather of the Dawn* serves as a case in point. From the late 1880s through the 1910s and early 1920s, Walpi was a tourist hotspot for those hoping to see a Hopi Snake Dance ceremony. It was also the site of the first official restriction of photography of a specific Southwestern Indian ceremony; photographic restrictions—limiting photography and filming to use for historic, not commercial, purposes—were enforced at a Snake Dance on August 21, 1913.[16] Shawn was not photographing or otherwise reproducing a Snake Dance; his piece includes a "Corn Dance," "Basket Dance," "Eagle Dance," "Wolf Dance," and others woven into a dramatized legend Shawn interprets. But the site of Walpi nonetheless registers a history of conflict between Hopi dance ceremonies and non-Hopi viewers and intruders,[17] a focal site of conflicting worldviews about the need or desire to preserve or document a dance, about the force and function of representation.

DANCE AS ART AND THE AMERICAN INDIAN ARTS AND CRAFTS ACT

Paradoxically, then, even as they protested government policy banning dance as immoral or implicitly sacrilegious, artists and activists participated, however inadvertently, in federal rhetoric and tourist presumptions regarding American Indian culture and dance. Shawn's taking of dance material for his own artistic use, and making them contained, shortened, productive—not too wasteful of time or effort—supports the rhetoric of Burke's 1923 letter, outlawing dance on the grounds that it kept Indians from being productive enough land dwellers. It also fell in step with 1930s U.S. governmental policy that turned the country's focus toward Native American culture's importance not for the religious and healing needs of its own communities and understandings of the world, but in American culture at large.

Official federal restrictions on Native American religious practices ended on January 4, 1934, when Indian Commissioner John Collier issued Circular no. 2970, "Indian Religious Freedom and Indian Culture." This circular reversed Burke's antidance policies and initiated an era in which Indian dance was

no longer officially restricted. Congress then passed the Indian Reorganization Act, or Wheeler-Howard Act, of 1934. This bill brought to an end the policy of allotment and (albeit paradoxically) established some federally sanctioned guidelines for Indian self-government. Alongside these two 1934 legislative endeavors—and ideologically linked to them in several ways—came mounting support for the importance of Indian arts and crafts. For years, Collier had been reiterating a point he included in part of the "Indian Religious Freedom and Indian Culture" circular—that Indian arts and crafts were to be "prized, nourished and honored—and promoting a marketing scheme for Indian arts and crafts products" (Prucha, *Great Father,* 951). In 1930, a bill to create a board that would promote the production and sale of Indian products was introduced in the House. That bill died within the year, but Collier's enthusiasm did not, and in 1935 Congress passed the Indian Arts and Crafts Act. The committee promoting the bill argued that the "key to a materially wider market and materially increased income for the Indian arts and crafts lies . . . in an improved production—through improved production processes, through better products, and through better adaptation of products to American usage" (Prucha, *Great Father,* 974–75). To accomplish this, the bill established a board of five members, appointed by the secretary of the interior, to promote Indian arts and crafts and expand the market for them. Part of its charge was to create government trademarks of genuineness and standards of quality; to establish standards and regulations for the use of such trademarks; and to license, and charge a fee for, their use. It allowed for the fining and imprisonment of anyone caught using these government trademarks on goods or products that were not Indian products of the particular tribe or group (Prucha, *Documents,* 229). Like the Citizenship Act of 1924 and the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1935 legislated increased federal mechanisms of control over Indian lives, culture, and resources. In regulating the production of Indian Arts and Crafts often linked to ceremonial practice, this heralding of Native arts and crafts took the place of—yet in some ways continued—federal control over Native religious practices, despite Circular no. 2970's end of official restrictions on them.

Modern dance choreographers' repeated support for American Indian dance as authentic material from which they could then draw freely for their own artistic dance production anticipated and reinforced the focus of these policies on safeguarding art. Shawn, for example, protested federal restrictions of American Indian dance not because they infringed on Native American religious rights or because the restrictions were harmful to Native peoples' well-being, but rather, as the citation opening this chapter indicates, as "a great artistic crime." What Shawn saw as "vanishing tribes" and their dances served as a primary source of American dance, and preserving their dance material a special charge of American choreographers engaged in producing great art. By

reiterating claims of dance as an art, and of the curtailment of it as an "artistic crime," in other words, these modern dancers tapped into policy that shifted focus from dance as part of religious, ceremonial, or healing practices. Like the Arts and Crafts Act, this approach reinforced dance's value, and availability, to non–Native Americans. As Michelle Raheja writes in her analysis of the act:

> Ironically, the Act didn't promote the preservation of Native American spiritual and social practices through the fostering of ceremonial, personal, and communal objects such as baskets and sand paintings, but promoted the creation of objects that could be readily sold for mass consumption in the tourist trade. The initial Indian Arts and Crafts Act, along with a host of other legal interventions ostensibly designed to protect Indian culture from non-Indian encroachment, fits hand in glove with the promotion of capitalism and Pan-Indian, not tribally-specific identities.[18]

Like other Indian-made "arts and crafts" products, dance as art (rather than as religion) was a useful commodity available to the public, and this public recognition of the value of Indian arts, the bill asserted, could better Native Americans economically. At the same time, Indian dance as art would also be adapted for the use of (implicitly non-Native) Americans.[19]

While this bill did not attempt to regulate the buying and selling of Indian dance (and debates about copyrighting dance movements and choreographies continue today), its rhetoric seems nonetheless to have influenced modern dancers with interests in Indian dance. The Arts and Crafts Act reinforced the idea that literal reproduction of dance steps or movements might *not* be allowable by non-Indian dance artists seeking to reproduce dances exactly. Shawn's disclaimers on the subject fit within this framework. Shawn describes his second ballet, *The Feather of the Dawn,* in which he stages himself as a Hopi dancer, noting, "The scene was a reproduction of the village of Walpi, and many of the costumes were authentic Hopi pieces." And yet, he explains:

> The dance writing was, frankly, adaptation. One must see the original, and become aware of its inner import as well as its visible pattern, but the literal reproduction is the function of the scholar and museum field worker. The function of the artist is to use authentic themes, as seeds from which to produce an art creation of his own. (*American Ballet,* 20)

Martha Graham's position as to the use of Indian dances is similar. "Although I have been greatly exposed to the Native American tribes, I have never done

an Indian dance. I've never done any ethnic dance. I've received an excitement and a blessing and a wonderment from the Indians," she writes in her autobiography. "The American Indian dances remained with me always, just like those haunting moments before sunrise in the pueblos, or my first view of the Hopi women in their squash blossom hair arrangements that I was to use in Appalachian Spring."[20] The focus, for both, is Southwest Indian dances as a kind of catalyst for artistic inspiration, their use in accessing and providing a sense of mysticism or style to use in their own creations.

The Arts and Crafts Act expressed anxieties about non-Indians exploiting a market for "genuine" Indian products, and explicitly forbade the passing off of artistic production by non-Indians as "Indian art." In this vein, its ideology required the kinds of disclaimers Shawn and Graham made about their Indian-influenced dances. With these comments, they adhered to the rhetoric, and eventually the law, of the day with its belief in "genuine" Indian art—and acknowledged the limits of their own abilities to produce it.

Yet the Arts and Crafts Act left space for dance artists to see spiritual or intangible aspects of dance, such as "an excitement and a blessing and a wonderment" Graham says she received from the Indians, as not protected by the act in spirit or letter. While the act underscored the use-value of Indian art, it deflected awareness of any use to the religious and spiritual aspects of American Indian dance; blessings and wonderment and religious inspiration were not understood as artistic commodities. Thus, while dance artists were quick to distance themselves from reproducing authentic dances, dance as spiritual inspiration or source of blessing could nonetheless be made unproblematically available to them for their own artistic needs.

Instead, they adhered to the idea of dance as art, and to the modernist ideal of individual artists charged with the ability—indeed the mandate—to glean from the shards of culture and history in their artistic production and, from those shards, to "make it new" and make it their own. Shawn's faith in the artist's ability to take from the "authentic themes" in Native American dance and use them "as seeds from which to produce an art creation of his own" fits firmly within this modernist ideal.

Shawn's view of the federal stance on Indian dance as "a great artistic crime," then, reflected and reinforced the growing interest of modernists, hobbyists, scouts, and collectors in Native arts and dances. For him and other dancers, Indian dance (and particularly Southwest Indian dance) served as available material to ground the Americanness of their projects, to provide a sense of awe and wonderment they could translate into their art, and (for Shawn) to negotiate issues of masculinity and sexuality, particularly for men out of the so-called heterosexual norm.

A FULL-BLOODED MASCULINE VIGOUR: TED SHAWN'S MEN DANCERS DANCING INDIAN

In the spring of 1914, Shawn auditioned for Ruth St. Denis's company by staging himself as an Aztec youth. St. Denis's own "Orientalist" approach to American dance was in full swing at the time, part of the general passion for the exotic in dance at the turn of the century that accompanied the project of U.S. imperialism that flourished at the time (in 1898 the United States annexed Hawaii, went to war in Cuba, and seized the Philippines from Spain). Her response to Shawn's Aztec impersonation was to declare, "This is the best male dancing material in America!" and to offer Shawn then and there a position in her company (Sherman, "American Indian Imagery," 369).

In 1930, Shawn split with Ruth St. Denis, both as wife and as dance partner with whom he'd formed the highly influential Denishawn in 1915, and formed his own company of Men Dancers. His oft-stated goal in this endeavor was to foster "an acceptance of the idea of dancing as a virile and manly sport and art expression," as he wrote in his 1926 book, *The American Ballet* (97). In a 1938 lecture on "Dancing for Men," he explained, "the dance as an art is emasculated, the great stars of the dance are women and the men have taken on an effeminate quality of movement."[21] Explicitly conceived of as a way to counter these assumptions, Shawn's all-male company, Ted Shawn and His Men Dancers, premiered their first concert in April 1933, opening with two pieces based on Shawn's conceptions of American Indian dance: *Osage-Pawnee Dance of Greeting* and *Invocation to the Thunderbird*. Throughout the seven-year tenure of the dance group, these and other Indian pieces were repertory staples, performed hundreds of times in locations from London to Boston to Vancouver and San Antonio.[22]

Shawn researched some of these "Indian" dances in books by non-Native scholars and ethnographers. Yet he also traveled to the Southwest and observed dances that formed the basis for some of his own, such as his 1923 *Hopi Indian Eagle Dance* (later revived for the Men Dancers). He noted the "great mystical insight" of the Pueblo and Hopi tribes, and his awe at the dances he saw when traveling there. "It was absolutely beyond me to analyze and catch this rhythm. It was the most fascinating thing I have ever seen," he wrote in 1926. "I have seen Hopi men do the Eagle Dance. There is no living white man today (and that included all of the greatest of the Russian Ballet, as well as American dancers, including myself) who, after spending a year studying this dance, would be able to do it" (*American Ballet,* 18).

When Shawn staged his *Hopi Indian Eagle Dance,* he clearly and admittedly gave in to this failure. The Southwest eagle dance is part of a multiple-day curing ceremony. At Tesuque Pueblo, for example, the Eagle Dance ceremony begins with a four-day fast. "Though danced only by two men, it is one of the most effective of all pueblo dances, and one which white dancers always wish

Ted Shawn, Hopi Indian Eagle Dance, *1923. Courtesy Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival Archives.*

to learn," wrote 1930s ethnologist Erna Fergusson, whom Shawn references as his friend, and whom he accompanied on at least one dance outing. "After a few lessons they readily understand why the dancers must be treated with medicine water for strength before they can do it. It requires unusual skill and an amazing

control of leg muscles in its stooping, swooping, and varied movements."[23] In an article on Tewa Pueblo dance (not Hopi, but nearby and probably some of what Shawn saw) Jill Sweet described similar power in Southwest dance events. "In addition to beauty and humor, Tewa dance events contain power," she writes, explaining how the experience of dancing, or even of watching dancing all day, is transformative. It often follows days of fasting and prayer, and accompanies rhythmic percussion that "creates an environment of sound conducive to transformation," she writes. "When the dancers take on the role of the buffalo, deer, Cloud People, or clowns, they take on the personality of the being they are impersonating. They become, in a very real sense, the animal or spirit. Hence, the experience is one of physical and psychological transformation to a heightened state of being" ("Beauty, Humor, and Power," 98).

Shawn's *Hopi Indian Eagle Dance,* however, makes no attempt to recognize the function and power of the Eagle, or of the Hopi ceremony he is embodying. In multiple ways, Shawn's two-minute piece evades the cultural, religious, and healing aspects of the Eagle Dance. For one, he stages the dance as a solo, where one dancer interrupts the line of Ponca dancers (who themselves have a soloist) with a giant swoop. Sweet notes how such a focus on the individual goes against the ideologies embedded in the Southwest dances she's seen. She writes how, for the Tewa, dancing in unison is aesthetically and culturally desireable: "The image of the entire group moving together should never be disturbed by someone who dances 'too hard.' In other words, a dancer who stands out from the others destroys the beauty of the group moving as one" ("Beauty, Humor, and Power," 94). Shawn also, as contemporary Blackfeet/Chippewa dancer/choreographer Rosalie Jones/Daystar has noted, completely alters Native American understandings by concluding his dance with the death of the Eagle he is impersonating. Jones writes how at the end of Shawn's piece, "Two hunters enter; they draw arrows and strike the eagle; it falters, staggers, finally collapses, gracefully, into the arms of two hunters, who drag it off into the wings." She explains, "Within most Native American tribes the eagle is a messenger that carries prayers to the Creator because it flies higher than all other creatures of the natural world. For us, it would be out of the cultural context to portray an eagle being shot, killed, and dragged away." Jones adds, "Ted Shawn was dancing dressed as an American Indian, but the choreography was pure vintage early modern dance in the genre of Anna Pavlova's famous 'dying swan.'"[24]

Shawn's modernist use of primitive materials, like other modernist artists' uses of primitive materials of the time, was thus not about engaging with the worldviews or religious and political concerns of the people he embodied. Nor was it about allowing their dance to transform the modern dance medium, recognizing it as a creative force that might alter his understanding of what dance is and does. Even less was it about sharing the stage with Native peoples or ceding them any control in the development of an American ballet. It involved no more than distanced engagement with Indian dances or dancers, or no at-

Ted Shawn and His Men Dancers, Ponca Indian Dance. *Courtesy Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival Archives.*

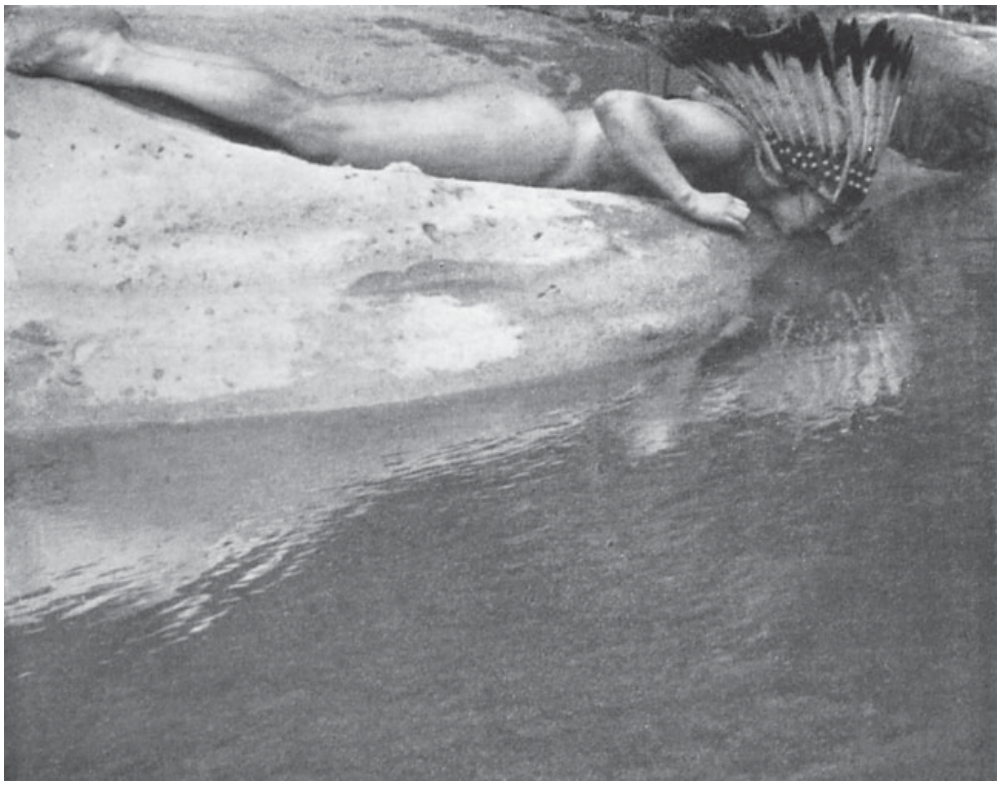
tempt to understand or engage the dance's roles in particular Native American worldviews.[25]

Instead, Shawn engaged this dance material, in part, to address his own concerns about masculinity and dance.[26] An anxiety about the "effeminate" and "emasculating" reputations of male dancers weighed heavy on him, as his own writing made clear.[27] Shawn's idea in creating an American ballet was to reject the preeminence of women modern dancers and argue for the need for male dominance in the dance world by proving "conclusively that dancing is and has been essentially and primarily a man's activity" (*American Ballet,* 89). Shawn argued for man's rightful domination in the field of dance by asserting that "Men have always done the big things, the important things in life, being quite willing to let the embroideries and ornamentations be the work of women" (93). He backed up his argument with references to nature, Greek drama, Roman theatre, "all the countries of the Orient," the great court ballets of Europe, and the strength, endurance, precision, accuracy, and extreme mental control that dance demands—all "generally considered masculine qualities" (92). He then

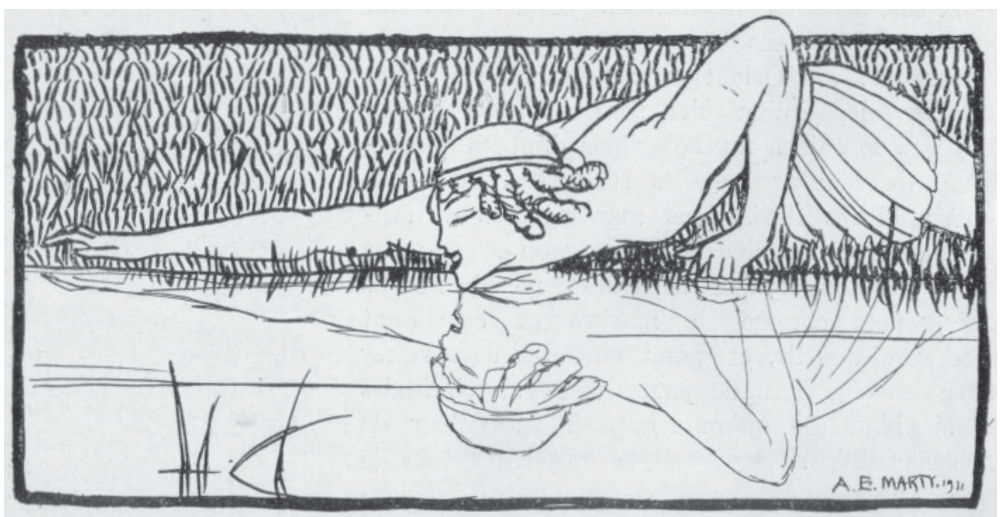
assigned both dance music and subject matter to specifically "masculine" and "feminine" categories, to be performed by men and women respectively.[28]

Having strictly defined these categories, Shawn turned to American Indian dance to fulfill his ideal of masculinity. When Ted Shawn and His Men Dancers began presenting work in 1933, Indian dances opened his program. Over the years, these Indian dances came to define Shawn's Men Dancers project.[29] Shawn biographer Walter Terry writes how *Invocation to the Thunderbird,* an exultant ritual rain dance based on "aboriginal sources" that Shawn developed to a John Philip Sousa piece called "The Red Man," became "almost [Shawn's] trade mark, an American Indian dance of great virility, strength, athletic prowess, and intense sense of ritual."[30] Nor was this one biographer alone in seeing Shawn's "Indian" pieces as paradigmatic of the kind of masculinity he hoped to project. A 1935 London reviewer tells how "two or three rather 'beefy' young men in the stalls" at a performance were "obviously out for a rag," given "traditional English distrust of anything even faintly savouring of effeminacy." The reviewer notes, however, how the young men's mood changed as soon as the curtain opened on *Primitive Rhythms*. "But from the moment the curtain rose on a wild Indian devil dance there was a change of feeling," the reviewer writes. "Nothing feminine here we decided, but a full-blooded masculine vigour wholly divorced from orthodox ballet. The dancers revealed a physique which might be—and quite possibly was, envied by the beefy young men."[31] The "full-blooded" vigor and physique the reviewer reads in the Indian dance thus deflects Shawn's dancers from potentially violent charges of "effeminacy" and instead makes them the envy of male viewers.

Part of this masculine ideal, for Shawn, included display of the nude male body. He wrote how "when the creative artist dancer thinks his biggest thoughts, he instinctively seeks to dance nude," adding, "We cannot associate the cosmic Man with clothes, because clothing suggests classification—clothes would place him as to race, nationality, period of history, social or financial status" (*American Ballet,* 65). He pointed to Walt Whitman, Greek culture, and the civic benefits of public nudity—which, he argued, would force us all not to corrupt our bodies and instead to "join the Y.M.C.A., and begin to develop some muscle; thus we would build up a physically more perfect race" (77). He then used the "Indian" dances in his repertoire, in particular, to fulfill this idea. In *Osage-Pawnee Dance of Greeting,* Shawn costumed the "half-naked, tawny-skinned men in genuine beaded buckskin panels that hung fore and aft from a beaded belt" (Sherman, "American Indian Imagery," 377). Barton Mumaw, Shawn's dancer for many years, told of the trials he had getting the Men Dancers to dress for the piece in a costume with a G-string that left the bottoms mostly uncovered, and to shave their pubic hair so as not to counter Massachusetts obscenity laws.[32] A 1935 reviewer remarked how in this "tribal number, the gentlemen would have made the ordinary chorus girl feel as if she was clothed for a blizzard."[33]



Ted Shawn, "Dancing and Nudity." Study by Arthur Kales. Courtesy Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival Archives.



André Marty, "Nijinsky as Narcisse," 1911. Copyright 2005 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP Paris.

Shawn was claiming that nudity allowed one to represent universal ideas and ideals. Yet while trying to claim that nudity provides this naturalized, dominant masculinity, unplaced "as to race, nationality, period of history, social or financial status," Shawn turned repeatedly to Indianness not only in his dances, but also in his photographic self-representations. For example, his chapter in *The American Ballet* on "Dancing and Nudity" includes not only a photo of Shawn as a nude classical statue, but also a photo of him lying naked on the bank of a river, staring at his reflection, wearing a feather headdress. All he sees in the river is head and headdress; the side of his nude body is instead displayed for those watching. Shawn, in an earlier piece on "The Defense of the Male Dancer," sought to distance himself from the Russian ballet dancer Vaslav Nijinsky, calling him "the decadent, the freakish, the feverish," and asserting instead that "America demands masculinity more than art."[34] Yet this self-portrait as Indian looking in river both references Shawn's relation to Nijinsky as a prominent male dancer and uses the Indian image to transform what Shawn saw as Nijinsky's "freakish" masculinity into a (to Shawn) more appropriate one for men who dance. In a famous print of "Nijinsky as Narcisse" from 1911, the dancer extends himself onto a river bank and gazes at his reflection, one arm bent at the elbow, hand pressing down. Shawn's image mirrors the Nijinsky print, including the crooked elbow, but replaces Nijinsky's tight cap with an Indian headdress.[35] Shawn, in other words visually encodes the importance of masculine dancing for men by donning the most visually recognizable sign of Indianness—a Plains-looking headdress—and using that image to signal a transformation from Nijinsky's "decadent" masculinity to the virile masculinity Shawn instead hopes to promote. This act of "playing Indian" both primitivized and stereotyped Native Americans, and served as a space in which to justify male nudity for, again, Shawn's own agenda.

Part of Shawn's intent in bolstering this virile masculinity was to divorce it from notions of homosexuality of the day. In many ways, he did; Susan Foster has argued compellingly that Shawn's choreography, like that of other early modern dancers, "sequestered sexuality." She writes how, "By showing the noble male body engaged in vital, virile expressive work, he begged entirely the questions of the dancers' sexual orientation" despite his many-year sexual relationship with Mumaw.[36] Shawn's Men Dancers concerts, she writes, "reaffirmed the anti-sexual stance of modern dance and defended his work against allegations of homosexuality" ("Closets Full of Dancers," 163). In her analysis of Shawn's Men Dancers choreography—its use of "relentless, repetitive, symmetrical" bodies, stiff torsos, rigid arms, clenched fists evoking images of brute strength, preference for frontal display—Foster argues that Shawn "directed attention away from the dancing body as a preconceived source of sexual impulses and towards the spatial and temporal properties of the movement" (164). Ironically, some of the very emblems Shawn deployed to deflect homo-

sexual allegations—including dressing as exotic other as a license for nude male display—also today signal homosexuality.[37] Yet however successful Shawn's work was at closeting homosexuality (and as Foster notes, for some young men in his audiences, it didn't entirely), Shawn's Men Dancers work, with the Indian dancing the group did at its helm, was instrumental in redefining the image of gay male dance. The image of masculinity Shawn and his dancers projected was far from that of the sensual, effeminate ballet dancer epitomized by Nijinsky. As Foulkes argues, "the almost hypermasculinity of his troupe diminished the homosexual implications of the bare bodies because it did not fit into the societal framework of homosexuality as fey, effeminate inversion" ("Dance Is for American Men," 129). Shawn's work, instead, made space for "hypermasculine" ideals. Although in the 1930s this hypermasculinity was presented as implicitly heterosexual, it also served to enable and foster a new genre of male dance identity distinct from that of the effeminate ballet dancer, one that at the very least made space for gay male performers and provided possibilities for alternative masculinities in dance.

In some ways, embodying Indianness might suggest possibilities for disrupting a one-way economy of "playing Indian." Deloria, for example, writes, "The donning of Indian clothes moved ideas from brains to bodies, from the realm of abstraction to the physical world of concrete experience. There, identity was not so much imagined as it was performed, materialized through one's body and through the witness and recognition of others" (*Playing Indian,* 184). Dance is a bodily act that requires interaction between peoples: you have to go and see the dance, meet and interact with Native peoples; you can't, like Picasso, just look at masks in museums or your studio. In this way, staging such as Shawn's might have refused the distancing that enabled other modernist appropriations of primitive culture. Yet for Shawn, staging Indian dance was not about actual embodiment. It was about dressing up as—dancing like an Indian, representing and making visible Indian dance images, reinforcing what Michael Taussig has called a Euro-American privileging of vision at the expense of other sensory involvements and relations. The limitation of his project, then, is not that Shawn appropriated Native culture for his own ends (although he does do this), but that he doesn't recognize the potentially radical import for witness and redress of his dancerly embodiment, and instead borrows only visual codes of Indian dress and undress to project his ideals about dance and masculinity.

Obviously, Shawn is a white man staging the dance away from Hopi peoples, contexts, and histories, and thus might be excused for not attempting to probe its relation to spiritual and ritual healing and transformation. And yet Sweet quotes a Tewa man instructing dancers on presenting shortened dances in urban centers for non-Indian audiences. "You've still got to dance with your whole heart because the songs and dance still are sacred and bring beauty, no matter if you dance here [in the village] or out there," he says ("Beauty, Humor,

and Power," 103). Shawn's dance registers none of the sacred, healing aspects of the Eagle Dance. Shawn's appropriation, then, comes not in putting on the culture of another. Although he does do that, that in itself could be seen as transformative, as some Native American dance itself is about taking on the transformative powers of another—the buffalo, wolf, deer, or eagle—by putting on regalia and recognizing one's relation to another being. Rather, Shawn's appropriation comes in his dancing Indian (and witnessing Indian dance) as if it didn't really effect any change in the dancer, audience, or world. Just as the CIA reports of the day dismissed the idea that the ceremonials had any actual effect in healing or bringing rain, so too do the artists. Shawn, for example, pokes gentle fun at the religious roles of the ceremonies he sees, writing in a tone of feigned awe of the Isleta winter solstice dances Fergusson takes him to, "And each year the ceremony is successful—the days immediately begin to grow longer!" (*American Ballet,* 17). Shawn distills an Eagle Dance he notes is "undoable by whites" for his own ideological and artistic purposes, without attentiveness to or respect for its power. In the end, his dancing supports Deloria's conclusion that the radical potential of Indian play ultimately most often "allowed one to evade the very reality that it suggested one was experiencing" (*Playing Indian,* 184).

Shawn's focus on visuality, on the one hand, is part of what marks the limits of the potential of "playing Indian," as Deloria lays it out, to not imagine but perform identity in a bodily act of witness and recognition. Yet as usual with this topic and history, any position is complicated and multivalent. In another sense, Shawn's focus on visuality was important given the racial ideologies of Indianness in America, where attempts at disappearance and lack of visibility or adequate blood quantum have long been used to dispossess American Indian peoples. Jones, for example, despite her quarrels with Shawn's renditions, nonetheless cites Shawn's importance in an essay on Native American stage dance. She sees his work as part of what signaled Native dance as invisible to American culture, and credits him with countering this cultural invisibility by helping start a historical trajectory of staged Native American dance that today includes American Indian Dance Theatre and her own company. "The American dance audience to whom he introduced it saw an Indigenous dance form that had become not extinct, but invisible in America of the 1930s," Jones writes.[38] She later explained, "I think that helped to carry on some image of the Native American at that time when the general public thought that Native Americans were a vanishing race and extinct, or about to become extinct."[39] It seems crucial to recognize and call forth not only the limits, but also the positive reverberations to Shawn's putting of Indian dance on stage as visible over sixty years ago.

In practical ways, too, Shawn's long-held interest in American Indian dance enabled the development of American Indian stage dance by American Indian

dancers. As Shawn began staging public dance performances at Jacob's Pillow, the Berkshire Farm he'd purchased, he actively solicited the work of numerous Native dancers to perform there. These include multiple appearances by Indigenous dancers not necessarily promoted as Indian—including José Limón (in 1946, 1948, 1950, 1951, 1952, 1953), Maria Tallchief (1951, 1957, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1964, 1965), and Marjorie Tallchief (1963, 1964)—as well as those who were, including Tom Two Arrows (Thomas Dorsey) in 1957 and six dancers from St. John's Indian School in Laveen, Arizona, in 1965. This promotion of Native dance continued even after Shawn's death in 1972 with several appearances by the American Indian Dance Theatre in 1989, 1995, and 1998. In this way, too, as Jones remarks, Shawn's interest in American Indian dance has helped acknowledge and make visible to dance-viewing publics a tradition of American Indian stage dance.[40]

The "deep red-brown paint" Shawn's male dancers put all over themselves before donning their G-strings and dancing Indian shared more with blackface makeup than with the painted markings of animal beings Native dancers wear when preparing to take on the spirit of another through dance. At the same time, it is important not to underestimate the transformative power of the dances he engaged with, promoted, and performed to, over time, effect transformation.

MANY INDIANS ABOUT: LESTER HORTON'S DANCE THEATRE

Lester Horton's interest in and engagement with American Indian dance overlaps chronologically and rhetorically with Shawn's, and shares many of its assumptions and limitations. In his early "Indian" pageant productions, Horton's renditions rehearsed familiar tropes, and problems, of "playing Indian" similar to those of Shawn's, and likewise reflective of the legal and rhetorical positioning of Native Americans during his day. Horton's self-staging as Indian in *Song of Hiawatha,* and of himself and other non-Native dancers in these other early productions, also echoed tropes in which the white man proves a better Indian than the Indian himself.[41]

American Indian dance was also far from the sole influence on Horton and his choreography. Accounts of his life and career stress his voracious appetite for learning about all kinds of peoples and cultures, and for drawing readily on what he encountered. At the Olympic Festival of the Dance at the Los Angeles Philharmonic in 1932, along with the *Kootenai War Dance,* Horton also presented *Voodoo Ceremonial,* inspired by a W. B. Seabrook book on Haiti,[42] which included African-inspired movement motifs he was to use throughout his career. In 1929, he performed with Michio Ito, who used Japanese Noh drama as a basis and based his movement vocabulary on upper body movements, and he toured with Ito for two years.[43] Dancers note his attraction to these and a whole

variety of different materials, and his dynamic, intuitive, and bold artistic engagements with them.

Yet a passion for learning about American Indian dance and history, and for collecting Indian drums, blankets, headdresses, masks, baskets, and numerous other materials, nonetheless particularly inspired Horton throughout his life, and infused his early career especially (Warren, *Lester Horton,* 6, 9). Numerous sources cite Horton's lifelong interest in—even obsession with—American Indian culture from his childhood days in Indiana, where he visited "mysterious Indian mounds," haunted museum displays of American Indian arts and artifacts, and pored over descriptions of stories, songs, chants, and dances at the public library. In some ways, his engagement with American Indian dance provides an alternative model to the acts of "playing Indian" performed by Shawn. Horton's work to a greater extent than others of his generation did allow for questions about "the social settings in which Indians and non-Indians might actually meet," which Deloria argues were so frequently pried apart from "the ways in which white Americans have used Indianness in creative self-shaping" (*Playing Indian,* 190). Horton's company did include Native American performers; he was interested not only in the visual or spiritual inspiration Native dance provided him, but also in ways Native dance practices influenced the processes of theatrical production he was exploring. Rather than mocking understandings of dance as transformative—as having effect on weather patterns or sun cycles—his "Indian" dances raised questions, however obliquely, among his audience members about the acts of transformation they enabled. And yet, Horton's engagement with Native American dance, and the influence it had on him, has been much less frequently acknowledged by dance historians than Shawn's or Graham's. While many factors may contribute to this neglect—Los Angeles–based Horton in general is much less frequently discussed than East Coast–based modern dance pioneers—it nonetheless raises questions about the kinds of Native American dance influence that critics and historians have been able or willing to see and acknowledge.

Horton apparently told the story of how his interest in dance was sparked when he saw a Denishawn concert in 1922 that included Shawn's *Xochitl,* and how he began to study dance the next year, at age seventeen, after seeing Shawn's *Feather of the Dawn*.[44] While "that was the story he told most frequently," biographer Larry Warren notes that "In different versions he sometimes attributed his awakening to dance to a touring wild west show which featured American Indian dancing" (*Lester Horton,* 8). Another critic writing on Horton's dance career cites a story Horton apparently told her about how, when "a tiny lad about five years old," Horton went to see the circus in Indianapolis. "Of all the wonderful sights at the circus, the most wonderful to Lester Horton were the Indians."[45] It seems, therefore, that Horton consciously presented his exposure

to theatricalized versions of "Indian" dance as central to his very beginnings as a stage dance choreographer.

Similarly, Horton consciously cultivated an "Indian" identity for himself as a dancer. In 1929, he writes, "That the American Indians and their tribal dances have always held a fascination for me is not surprising, when one considers the fact that my grandmother was a full-blooded Algonquin Indian" ("American Indian Dancing," 9). Margaret Lloyd reprises a version of this claim when she notes that "his interest in the American Indians . . . was also in his blood, since one of his great-great grandmothers was a full-blooded Algonquin and there was another Indian strain even farther back in his English-Irish-German ancestral mixture."[46] Biographer Larry Warren throws some doubt on these claims when he opens his biography of Horton by noting how

> In one or two interviews Lester Horton, who enjoyed indulging his fantasy on such occasions, told of a full-blooded Algonquin Indian grandmother. He also spoke from time to time of an abolitionist ancestor who had worked with the underground railroad helping slaves to the North and to freedom. Probably closest to the truth was his description of his forbears as a motley collection of English, Irish, and German immigrants who had settled in the Indianapolis area without particularly distinguishing themselves. (*Lester Horton,* 4)

Regardless of how much truth lies behind Horton's self-presentation as a little bit Indian, what is undoubtedly true is that his cultivation of this identification infused his initial self-conception, and his presentation to the world, as a dancer and choreographer. For a short time early in his career, Horton used the professional name "Okoya Tihua" to publicize his appearances in the *Hiawatha* pageant, a name Warren writes was drawn from American Indian mythology (25). At points, following his interest and apparent expertise in things Indian, others would attach Indian names to him. One acquaintance, Elsie "Pellie" Martinez, at whose house Horton lived for a period in 1928 during the *Hiawatha* tour, notes how he charmed her and others from her circle of friends in Piedmont, California. "We were very interested in the Indians of the Southwest, and he knew a great deal . . . had a feel for the people," she recounted. "My husband was a wild, picturesque Mexican who was very fond of Lester and nicknamed him Quaché, the Hopi word for buddy (pal)" (Warren, *Lester Horton,* 26–27). On the one hand, Horton's insistence/invention of an "Indian grandmother" and his adoption of "Indian" names are familiar tropes, both from the 1920s when Indianness had come to signal true Americanness—so being a little bit Indian made one legitimately American—though also dating back at least as far as the

Pocahontas myth and continuing today in New Age appropriations of Indian identity. At the same time, Horton seems to have been playfully aware of the tropes and desires for Indian authenticity with which he was flirting. Warren recounts an instance, after a *Hiawatha* performance, when one of his supporters whispered to Horton "that when the wind blew against his loincloth, 'you could see white skin.' 'Don't worry, Mama,' Horton reassured her, 'it's all absolutely authentic,'" Warren writes (*Lester Horton,* 23). His playful insistence that his visible whiteness did not trump claims to Indian identity pokes fun at understandings of Indianness as visible in skin tone or blood quantum, and at ideas of authenticity.

Like Shawn, it seems that Horton initially gleaned many of his ideas about Indians from books and museums, both intensely mediated spaces whose representations of "authentic Indian" culture are always already contained by the limits and biases of their authors and curators, and by the practices of ethnographic scholarship and museum collecting themselves. At the same time, Horton, like Shawn, also traveled to see Native American dances practiced live. "Arrangements were made for several trips to Indiana reservations so that Lester could study at first hand the dances he would be performing and teaching for Hiawatha," Warren writes (*Lester Horton,* 15). Lloyd adds that while director of the Indianapolis Theater Guild in 1926, "he managed to attend any Indian ceremonial within negotiable distance. . . . He lived among the Indians, danced with them, learned their lore, and came home to create dances and costumes on the authentic base" ("Modern Dance," 279). Warren continues, "The following spring he spent several weeks in Santa Fe where . . . Lester was given the opportunity to learn from excellent Indian performers who taught him dances as well as complex chants. He claimed to have been invited to perform in public with his teachers; a rare compliment if true" (*Lester Horton,* 15). While it is hard to know in what sense he "lived among the Indians" or "danced with them" in Indiana, or who the "excellent Indian performers" in Santa Fe were, what they thought of Horton, and what actually transpired during those lessons, it seems likely that some level of actual personal engagement and corporeal interaction, rather than just distanced visual observation, did transpire between Horton and the dancers with whom he worked.

Perhaps the greatest difference between Horton's and Shawn's models lies in this danced interaction between him and Native peoples, a connection that carries over into his dance training and production practices as well. While Shawn's interaction with the Native American dance forms he reproduced on his own body seems to have been from watching them from a tourist's vantage point, Horton's interests, geographic location, and personality compelled him, throughout his life, into more sustained engagement with Native American people—as with other people from a great diversity of backgrounds. Warren notes his "easy rapport with members of minority ethnic groups living in the

Lester Horton, Pueblo Eagle Dance, *1929. Photograph by Toyo Miyatake.*

Los Angeles area," a description reinforced by the recollections of numerous dancers and company members, and attested to by the multiracial makeup of his company well before the Civil Rights movement (*Lester Horton,* 70). Most famously, his company included African American dancers Alvin Ailey, James

Lester Horton, Prairie Chicken Dance, *1929. Photograph by Toyo Miyatake.*

Truitte, and Carmen de Lavallade, Mexican American dancers such as Renaldo Alarcon, and Japanese American dancers such as Misaye Kawasumi who performed a memorial to Hiroshima in 1952—an interracial mix practically unheard of in the 1950s. Anecdotes tell of the friendly relations Horton had and

Lester Horton, Pueblo Eagle Dance, *1929. Photograph by Toyo Miyatake.*

warm welcomes he received from merchants and artists from Los Angeles's many diverse communities, of Horton refusing bookings at night clubs that would have required he "send all Black, Oriental, or white performing units," and of hotels refusing the interracial company accommodations in 1953 (Warren,

Lester Horton, Prairie Chicken Dance, *1929. Photograph by Toyo Miyatake*

Lester Horton, 188). In his history of African American concert dance, John O. Perpener III notes, "Colored by its founder's eclecticism, social consciousness, and eccentricities, the Lester Horton Dance Theatre drew its material from different cultures, and Horton would not tolerate racial discrimination among its members" (*African-American Concert Dance,* 196).

Less well known, yet still in line with this policy and practice of interaction and interrelation, was Horton's inclusion of Native American performers in his Indian pageants. When *The Song of Hiawatha* debuted in California on July 2, 1928, Horton "even had a few *real* Indians in this production," Warren writes (*Lester Horton,* 22). Bella Lewitzky, who danced with Horton from 1934 through 1950, writes how "When I first came to the studio, there were many Indians about. We learned songs and dances from them. We couldn't master the falsetto that the men use, but we sang Cherokee and Navajo songs, and learned Pueblo dances."[47] She explains further, referring to Horton's studio on 7375½ Beverly Boulevard:

> In the studio were intertribal Indians, because there was an intertribal Indian center in Los Angeles. I remember a woman named Kuuks Walks Alone—a big Indian girl. Lester brought into his studio many, many of the Indians. He had a great fondness for their craft, for their culture, for their songs, their dances, and we learned them. We learned Cherokee songs and Cherokee dances. . . . Lester did the hoop dance and the eagle dance, and I think they must have been really quite authentic. Because having seen them later, if my memory doesn't serve me too badly, I think he was good at it—what he did.[48]

Both Warren and Margaret Lloyd also mention Kuuks Walks Alone, who danced with Horton during the early pageants and stayed on after as part of the group. She is listed as "Personnel of the Lester Horton Group" on the program to a piece Horton choreographed and staged in 1934 to Ravel's *Boléro,* to which, Warren notes, he'd given a gypsy setting (*Lester Horton,* 54).

Lewitzky and other dancers who worked with Horton suggest that this interest in Native American culture and dance, and this interaction with a diverse group of dancers including some Native Americans, influenced not only the specific choreography of Horton's "Indian"-themed pieces, but his technique as a whole. One site for such effect came through the involvement of such a diverse group of dancers in Horton's classes and company, and the influence Horton drew out of them in developing his technique. Company member James Truitte explains that while Martha Graham built her technique on her own body, "Lester, on the other hand, did his technique on his company, so he could work with every kind of body and therefore he could explore the anatomy more, and any kind of body can do the Horton technique."[49] Horton, then, developed his technique through the people and bodies physically present around him, including undoubtedly some of the "many, many," Indians there. Unlike Shawn, then, whose practice and process of choreographing using "Indian" material came from his visual observation of them as a tourist and who didn't create spaces for Native American performers, or enable them or the

dance practices he witnessed to transform his understandings of dance or the stage, Horton's dance-making process it seems did at least allow for this participation and its influence.

That Native American dance influenced the development of Horton's technique echoes overtly and implicitly through discussions of it. A well-known video on Horton's career asserts that "his technique came out of a deep identification with the spirit of Native American ceremonial dance."[50] In her oral history, Lewitzky remarks, "he adored American Indians, and made that his leitmotiv. He came back to it again and again" (74). She then goes on to describe how "his love for a variety of cultures also penetrated his work. . . . So his influences, which were basically American Indian, oriental, African American, were all somewhere, part of what we did" (98). She recalled compositional assignments that described "form more than content," where instead of asking his dancers to move from emotions ("Do a happy dance, do a sad dance"), Horton would instead ask for "A circle dance, a square dance," Lewitzky said. "In his improvisation, he could go—I can remember one instruction he gave to the class: 'Travel across the floor like a praying mantis.' We're westerners. I never saw—I thought that was the most wonderful term, 'praying mantis.' What could that be?" (100). Her comments suggest that his approach focused on spatial direction rather than individual emotional interiority, and on improvisation initiated from imitations of other beings—and that she saw this as a non-Western instruction. Biographer Larry Warren recently asserted, "With the help of a friend who knows a great deal about movement analysis, I am nearly convinced that the technique that Lester Horton developed for training dancers, as well as his approach to movement in his choreography were considerably affected by study and performance of American Indian dance."[51]

Other characteristics of Horton's company and process also seem to overlap with some aspects of many Native American dance practices, aspects that have influenced contemporary Aboriginal dance programs and choreographers as well. Horton tended to involve large groups of dancers in his pieces—some with more training than others (often to the chagrin of his more professionally trained dancers like Lewitzky). Dorathi Bock Pierre suggests that this early interest in group work stemmed from his interest in and exposure to American Indian dances:

> Horton's dances were at first solos, and he was dissatisfied with this, for nearly all primitive dancing is group dancing, with an occasional solo figure stepping out, motivated by the group. The moment he felt sure of his own work, felt he was moving in the right direction, his ambition became to form a group of dancers, a group who felt as he did, that the beauty, significance, and importance of the primitive dance had an educational and theatrical value today. ("From Primitive to Modern," 14)

Horton's theater practice also didn't separate dance movement from other aspects of performance. Lewitzky writes, "For the Indians, singing is an important part of dancing—they don't separate the two. Lester staged works that combined both." She adds, "Today I am amused to find people saying, 'It's so new to have dancers who speak.' We all spoke, we all sang. We had total theater" ("Vision of Total Theater," 46). Part of this "total theater" approach also included involving participants in the entire process of dance making, rather than just the performance itself. "Everyone participated in all phases of the creative process," Warren writes (*Lester Horton,* 38). "Everyone was responsible for some aspect of production, and was expected to participate in the making and maintenance of costumes, props, and scenery, and in the upkeep of the studio" (14). As numerous scholars of Native American dance ceremonial practices have noted, this is also an aspect of most Native dance rituals, in which the days and weeks of preparation form as integral a part of the ceremony as the dance presentation itself.[52] Horton's interest in "choreodramas," or choreographies with strong bases in story and narrative, also resonates both with Native American ceremonial dances, which most often proceed with a narrative trajectory or purpose, if not actually based on a story, and also with contemporary Aboriginal stage dance pieces.[53] Lewitzky's discussion of Horton's development as a choreographer suggests that his development as a "narrative dance maker" followed, in part, from his interest in Native dance:

> But he also moved from Oscar Wilde and Indian lore into an area where he was a narrative dance maker and dropped the other elements except as he needed them. So that by the time I studied with him, he was inventing a technique. (Oral History, 78)

She implies that his strong interest in narrative dance is something that was *not* dropped from his engagement with "Indian lore" even after he no longer directly dealt with "Indian" topics.

Horton's productions also led some dancers and audience members to at least ponder the relation between dance ritual and transformative processes. Unlike Shawn's "Indian" dances, which audiences understood as purely theatrical renditions, Horton's dancing at times raised questions about their effect. Warren writes that one "dancer in the production recalled that, after one particularly stirring performance of 'Invocation to the Thunder God,' the audience was startled to hear a crash of thunder in the starry California night, followed by a few drops of rain, which was almost unheard of in that part of the country in July" (*Lester Horton,* 23).

Horton's fervent and unwavering dedication to dance, and his giving of his life to it as a practice, likewise echoes some understandings of Native American ceremonial dance. Belinda James, a classically trained ballet dancer from San Juan Pueblo living in New York City, remarked that what appeals to her about

ballet is the complete dedication and training—the life commitment—ballet requires: "I respect the training. It's an honorable and amazing thing," she said. "If you're a pilot, you can't just have an off day. This is how [dance] should be—it should be that seriously taken." James connected this belief in the seriousness of dance, its importance and the responsibility of those who do it, to Pueblo rituals. "That's how the rituals are," she said, noting the honor, and the responsibility, of those who are called upon to perform tribal rituals. "You don't decide [to be a dancer or leader]—the elders come up and say. You don't have a choice." When this happens, the understanding is that "you should be honored that you're going to be part of this whole universal responsibility."[54] Of course, Horton is famous for drawing untrained dancers into his company and onto the stage (and from there, demanding they give their lives to it); nor was Horton's dedication to dance unique to him. One need only think of Graham or Balanchine for examples of other choreographers who also gave their lives to dancing, and demanded unwavering, all-consuming dedication from their dancers. Yet the intensity of Horton's dedication to dance was clearly central to him and to his project, and is noted in virtually every discussion of him and his work.[55] This approach to dancing and the demands it placed on those who danced with him—however newly arrived—seem in line with the understandings of the vital role of dance and the crucial importance of dance's work on the community and the world engaged within some Native American ceremonial dance practices.

Both Lewitzky and Warren suggest that Horton's early and explicit interest in Indian dances and cultures, engaged within specifically "Indian" movements and stories, was diffused as his technique developed over the years. Lewitzky describes ways that, even though he danced Hoop and Eagle Dances with the "many, many" Indians in his Beverly studio, Horton engaged with Indian material in his choreography in a more generalized way. "The next things that occurred [after Horton's interest in 'visual color and mass' that stemmed from his pageantry background] would be his love of Indian lore and legend, with which he took generous artistic liberties," Lewitzky said. "They were never meant to be historically accurate, nor even culturally accurate—somewhat, because he loved and respected these people." Though he "skirted around all the time these ideas" of ethnic religious and ceremonial dancing, including "a chango ceremony within the voodoo—which he called 'voudoun'—religion," and "captured some of it," Lewitzky suggests he did so,

> I think probably less successfully than in the American Indian, where he loved it better, or knew it better, or a combination of both—so that he could by moving away from what was specifically given to that society make it larger, move to a distillation of certain ideas. And that permitted him to cross the boundaries into

> things not actually given to that particular community, but basically ceremonial. ("Vision of Total Theater," 110)

Lewitzky continued by describing pieces that, in this vein, sought not to reproduce particular Indian dances or ceremonies, but to move to this "distillation of certain ideas." She describes, in particular, the set of his 1948 piece, *Totem Incantation,* as "a rather generic thing" (106). "The purity was to his vision and not to the particular tribal truths" (107). She adds:

> *Totem Incantation* had a blanket dance in it, which he totally invented, and it was very, very charming. The young man—When he has come of age and chosen his maiden, they dance. It's a mix of wedding dance and, say, just a ritual dance of springtime for two young people. Again, it tends to be generic rather than authentic, but in so doing, it captured something a little larger than whatever else it would have been. (108)

Warren's description of Horton's later material is similar. "Some of the newer movement material was abstracted from his recent choreographic excursions into ethnic sources, but now, rather than the gestures and postures he had utilized in his less mature years, it was the energy of the primitive that he captured and restated in his own terms" (*Lester Horton,* 157).

On the one hand, Horton's "Indian" dances share many problems with Shawn's "Indian" pieces, and with many other dramatic representations of Indians of the period. These told narratives of Indian death or disappearance, and/or rehearsed and inscribed familiar tropes in which white men prove better Indians than Native peoples themselves. Anecdotes also suggest an exotification of Indians in Horton's performance career. For example, Lewitzky writes how in the early days, in Chicago, Horton "earned his living by dancing in nightclubs, mostly just a little loincloth and a very elaborate headdress—that would be typical of him—with joss sticks all around" ("Vision of Total Theater," 76). Horton's distillation of Indian ceremonial materials for use in his own artistic productions likewise shares some troublesome aspects with Shawn's in the way he abstracted and made use of Native materials as he needed them, divorcing these from the contexts in which they were practiced and performed.

And yet, something seems different here as well. For one, Horton engaged with Native American dance and culture not as a passing fancy, or as a tourist watching from the sidelines, but with a lifelong commitment and dedication, and as someone who actively sought out not just Native dance materials (although he did do that), but also Native peoples and teachers. For another, it seems from the choreographic descriptions available that Horton's "Indian" pieces were not antithetical to the spirit of the dances they engaged with, the

way Shawn's "dying swan" Eagle Dance was. Perhaps also the way that the Indian influence on Horton's dance technique and dance making *wasn't* visible, after a certain point in his career, yet still seems to have been central to his technique and theatrical approaches was itself indicative of a long-term engagement with Native culture, and an understanding of its influence in something other than visual terms.

This is not to suggest that Horton's career was only or even primarily influenced by Native American ceremonial dance, or that it profoundly influenced contemporary Native American and Aboriginal stage dance. The influence of his interest in American Indian dance was central to his early career especially, but ultimately was only one influence of many, even during this period. His involvement with Native American dancers and peoples seems to have largely dropped out by the 1940s, and with it—perhaps appropriately—his staging of explicitly "Indian" themes and materials. At this point dancers from various other backgrounds influenced his work much more directly—and vice versa. Horton's impact, for example, on the development of African American stage dance is much more profound and overt than his impact on Native American stage dance.[56] This influence can be traced most dramatically through the career of his student Alvin Ailey. "Lester Horton turned out to be the greatest influence on my career," Ailey writes in the 1989 foreword to a book on Horton's technique. "The technique I learned from Lester has continued to affect and influence me and my work. It is an important part of the curriculum of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center, and continues to be an inspiration for my choreography."[57] Perpener notes how, after Horton's death, "Ailey assumed the duties of company director and choreographer, moving a step closer to the artistic career that would dominate his life" and profoundly influence concert dance worldwide (*African-American Concert Dance,* 197).

On the other hand, this influence on African American stage dance, through Ailey, Carmen de Lavallade, and James Truitte among others, may itself have been charged by Horton's involvement with Native Americans and Native American dance. The first piece Ailey saw performed by the Horton company, as he watched from the wings in 1948, was *Totem Incantation,* the piece Lewitzky describes above. This piece, based upon North American Indian coming-of-age ceremonies, tells the story of a Young Man who asks a Shaman to be "conducted through the ceremony of acquiring a guiding spirit." The program for this piece tells how, when the Young Man returns from his fast in preparation for this, "the Shaman selects the eagle as the Young Man's guiding spirit." The arms for Horton's 1952 *Liberian Suite,* a piece that first featured de Lavallade and Truitte, both of whom later worked with Ailey, and which Ailey himself rehearsed—and later staged on his own company—bear a striking resemblance to those of Horton's earlier Eagle Dance poses. They also bear some resemblance to the curved outstretched arms of groups of forward-bent dancers in Ailey's

signature piece, *Revelations,* arms represented in so many pictures of that piece. *Revelations* was of course much more directly based in and inspired by African American spirituals and African dance–derived movements than by any subtle and many-times mediated invocation of an Eagle Dance. Yet might not the influence of Horton's explorations of Native American dance, infused throughout his choreography and perhaps carried over into the choreography of his students, have remained, however obliquely, in their work, in ways that have not been adequately recognized? Whatever its sources, Ailey's *Revelations* formed part of the background teaching, and inspiration, for young Aboriginal dancers at the Chinook Winds Aboriginal Dance Project at Banff Centre for the Arts in 1996. In a journal entry about her experiences there, Inuit dancer Siobhán Arnatsiaq-Murphy writes:

> When I watched the videos in the evenings, I thought to myself, I can achieve that, I could someday be that. One of the videos we viewed was Alvin Ailey's *Revelation[s]*. In a lounge surrounded by my peers I cried three times, shielding my face from the others, it was only for me to know. . . . Here at this moment, I found what it is to be touched by a performance.[58]

It seems possible that Horton's explorations and acknowledgement of Native dance may have influenced even his later dancing, and that of his students, in specific ways, rather than simply being absorbed into a larger Americanizing dance project.

Horton's choreographic relationship to masculinity also differs from that of Shawn, and of Erick Hawkins. Shawn and Hawkins explicitly turned to Native American dance as a way of negotiating, projecting, and validating a sense of virile masculinity they worried both ballet and American modern dance troubled. Horton, however, seems to have explored both masculinity and sexuality through his choreography without engaging Native American or other ethnic dance traditions to justify his doing so. This is not to say that his choreography didn't directly investigate masculinity, nor does it mean that Horton didn't investigate sexuality and eroticism using ethnic dance material. But an overt interest in and projection of both male and female sexuality had been part of Horton's oeuvre since the early days, from the protruding papier maché bosoms worn by Elizabeth Talbot-Martin in the 1934 *Salome,* through his 1937 *Sacre de Printemps* (in which the angular and sensual movements of the dancers and the harmonic and rhythmic score startled audience members, some of whom saw the piece as "obscene"), through the sensuality of his *Liberian Suite,* which Warren called "pure Horton and, as such, . . . ahead of its time: too bold, too colorful, too physical for 1952" (*Lester Horton,* 166). "Since the late 1930s, [Horton's] designs had boldly enhanced the sexual attractiveness of

the dancers," Warren writes. "Both sexes were made to look alluring and confident in their sexuality" (151). Anecdotes likewise attest to Horton's interest in men dancing with awareness of their sexuality.[59] Warren notes, "There was an aggressive masculinity to his work in both the choreographic material and the sometimes brash and clumsy but always extroverted movement material" (96). Ailey notes that it was, in part, this exploration of masculinity through dance that led him to Horton. "A friend had shown me some Lester Horton movements and they seemed exciting and masculine," he writes.[60] While Horton's sexually charged and overt pieces sometimes drew on recognizably ethnic dance material—*Liberian Suite* certainly included African-derived movement, costumes, and subject matter—in none of them did Horton seem to be using this material as a way of justifying or exoticizing his interests in exploring and projecting masculinity or sexuality on stage. Rather, this sexuality infused much of his choreographing, including not only these more clearly ethnically influenced pieces, but also those marked more in line with a Protestant sexual repression, such as *The Beloved,* a charged and erotic duet with Lewitzky and Herman Boden based on a newspaper story in which a man beat his wife to death with a Bible for suspected infidelity. In a way, Horton's refusal to assign his explorations of sexuality to ethnic movements or materials may have been, in part, what caused such controversy, even leading some of his dancers to balk at what they saw as his bawdiness when, they thought, he should have been addressing more serious leftist political issues of the day. Unlike the trajectory of "closeted sexuality" Foster traces, Horton did make dances that were overtly about sex and the pleasures, powers, and pains that attend sexuality. While they do not directly address his own homosexuality the way more contemporary choreographers address theirs, it nonetheless also refuses the narrative of "chaste dancing" that Foster notes defined so much early modern dance.

Lewitzsky does suggest, however, that Horton's homosexuality was, perhaps, part of what led to his feelings of commonality with and his relationships with other peoples considered outside the mainstream, including Native Americans. "That he was outside the mainstream of society and so were all the people he loved . . . gave them common ground," she said. "He was just obviously weird," she said, asking, "who has hair down to here, curly, and this is the day of the crewcut, wears a Navajo velvet shirt with silver buttons on it open down to his navel—and this long before our singer friend [Elvis Presley] ever appeared that way in public and was loved for it—and tight pants with an Indian woven belt." Lewitzky added:

> He was outside the pale. He was also homosexual. In those days, there was no such thing as an overt homosexual . . . homosexuality was not something that the major society would have accepted. So he was an artist, a maverick, he dressed as he pleased,

> quite beautifully, but in the eyes of the world peculiar, and he was a homosexual. That's about as outside I think, as you can get from the mainstream. (Oral History, 114–15)

This commonality as outsiders, Lewitzky hypothesized, led to Horton's "particular love—and it was truly that—and really abiding interest in almost all cultures that were exotic." She added:

> The colorful ones, the theatrical ones, appealed to Lester. Now, they had costume, color, legend, design elements that appealed to his theater sense, and I think that might have had something to do with why he might have, I think, been attracted to them. But I think more profoundly, he was welcomed by them. These were people outside the pale of society in those days, far more than they ever would be today, and Lester loved them. And they invited him into their world with open arms. He was always welcome. (111)

Horton's approach, in other words, was not to stage himself as a scantily clad Indian (at least after his early nightclub days) as a way of masking or obscuring readings of his sexuality, as Shawn did when Shawn staged exotic visual images of Indianness so that this Indianness, and not his interest in male physicality and sexuality, would code as exotic and erotic. Horton, it seems, instead sought out peoples from cultures that were, like him, also "outside the pale"—including Native Americans from an "intertribal Indian center in Los Angeles"—and developed professional connections and friendships with them. His impulse was not to use images of other exotic cultures to mask his staged explorations of sexuality, but to find spaces of community where a colorful, talented, theatrical, driven, gay man would be welcomed and nourished.

Horton's dance company, however—like radical modern dancers working in New York during the 1930s—has been largely relegated to a minor role in the development of American modern dance.[61] Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn, and Martha Graham generally comprise the primary players in narratives of early modern dance, with Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, and José Limón in their footsteps. Historians have attributed this neglect of Horton to his geographic location in Los Angeles, far from the dance center of New York and from its increasingly influential critics. Yet it also seems that some of his company's characteristics—including some influenced by his involvement with Native American culture and people—also made Horton's work particularly unreadable in the history of modern dance being developed and retold by historians. The size of his company, for one, made traveling financially and logistically complicated. His interest in group dancing, then, led in part to his inability to

adhere to touring and scheduling conventions of the day (and continuing still). More subtly perhaps, the company's explorations of movement seem more motivated by the theatrical effects of motion, color, movement, and the intense dedication he required of dancers expected to give all to all aspects of production and to the company, and less motivated by the tropes of natural individual expressionism that characterize narratives of modern dance. His dance making thus seems less about dance as reflection of inner expression than fits with the predominant "modern dance history" narrative in which modern dance is an "expressive" art, where "movement never lies."

Explicit in the Christian-based philosophies of François Delsarte, which helped legitimize middle-class white women's explorations of bodily practice and influenced the birth of modern dance, was the way gesture and movement accessed an inner natural. This impulse for inner emotional expression was understood to come from the soul. In this way, dance could be understood as an essentially harmless expression of emotional interiority, or of joy or amusement, in keeping with Christian ideals—including Delsarte's and even Mather's decrees—rather than threatening to them. Ted Shawn's interest in staging Native American dance seems in keeping with this ideal, in which Indian dance becomes a catalyst not for effecting transformative change in the world, but for exploring what he claimed were "natural" characteristics of masculinity. His early training as a Unitarian minister and his enthusiasm for Delsarte's explicitly Christian-based teachings serve to underscore suggestions of a Christian basis to this ideology.

Horton, on the other hand, seemed less interested in harnessing Indian dance practices and movement as an expression of a universalized natural than in exploring how that movement might affect and enrich a dance theater process and practice. This interest in the effects of dancing, not for the interiority of the soul it accessed, but for the theatrical and transformative effects it created, treads near Puritan fears of dance conjuring a wicked devil, or nineteenth-century fears of Indian dance invoking warlike passions—perhaps too near. It doesn't fit with the "birth of modern dance" narrative quite as neatly as Shawn's or Graham's explorations of Indian dance do.

This book has traced how, after widespread mainstream acceptance of Delsarte's system, federal regulators of the 1920s reconciled Indian dance and Christian ideologies, not by outlawing Native dances as dangerous, but by arguing that Indian dance is essentially harmless expression of joy or amusement. Burke, in the 1920s, described Indian dance as "art, refinement, healthful exercise" and "decent amusement" for Native Americans. To address the troublesome issue of multiple-day dance ceremonies' contrast with a Protestant work ethic that reinforced capitalist doctrines of productivity, officials pushed for dances to be shortened and made useful in amusing and keeping healthy their practitioners. Any danger of their doing what the Puritans feared—effecting

agency—was thus brushed off. The Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1935 furthered this ideology by focusing on the usefulness of Indian artistic production and stressing the economic benefits that Indian artistic commodities would bring Indians, and the educational and spiritual benefits they would bring non-Indian Americans. By asserting the usefulness of Native American arts in producing health and refinement, and economic self-sufficiency, Christian-influenced fears of dance's agency could be assuaged, and Christian-infused American ethics of productivity could be upheld. At the same time, ideologies (also Christian-informed) of culture as available to all, and appropriable in an ecumenical smorgasbord of shared cultures, could be upheld.

This trajectory, however, leaves little space for Native American dance as religious or spiritual practice with effects for, primarily, the communities of people engaged with it. Nor does it provide much space for explorations of Native American dance's transformative effects. Given this narrative, then, perhaps it makes sense that Native American dancers, and Native American dance, dropped out of narratives of modern dance history following this period heralding the artistic value of Indian dance. As just one example of this, Native American participation largely dropped out of Horton's company after the 1930s. And too, Horton's company dropped out of central narratives of modern dance history.

At the same time, perhaps this absence itself speaks volumes. The following chapter argues for the recognition of Indian dance's absence from modern dance history as central to the story modern dance has told—and begins to retell a part of a version of that story.