Toeing the Line: Erick Hawkins in Cold War America

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After the horror and upheavals of World War II, there was a desire in the United States to return to a traditional, "normal" life. The national discourse of the return to normalcy created problems for anyone or anything that was outside the defined normative life: Western, white, and heterosexual. While many artists pushed against the normative culture, Erick Hawkins, a modern dance choreographer, rarely did. Through the creation of the Hawkins technique and his choreographic aesthetic, Hawkins upheld the normalcy policies of the Cold War era through the utilization of his ideals of beauty and "natural," kinesthetically-correct dance. While Hawkins was falling in line with these Cold War policies, he failed to receive the recognition of fellow choreographers. He was unwilling to stay within the artistic parameters that critics and the State Department created for the modern dance canon. However, he was not radical enough to break the legacy of universalism and transcendence. Due to these reasons, Hawkins has been marginalized from discussion in the modern dance canon; however, his contribution to the field should not be overlooked because of the lines he was attempting to walk during an era of both political and artistic tension.

Hawkins was a classicist who believed that the natural, which refers to Hawkins' understanding of kinesthetically correct movement, was the only way to survive modern society. He argued against technology and mechanization which he often associated with ballet. Hawkins viewed the dance of the four cygnets from Swan Lake as a representation of the machine-like qualities of ballet (Hawkins 1992, 30). He felt that ballet went against the natural movement aesthetic he championed, which was more closely related to the antiquity-inspired dancing of Isadora Duncan. Auguste Rodin, a French sculptor from the turn of the century, argued that "whatever is false, whatever is artificial […] all that is only a parade of beauty and grace; all, in short, that lies is ugliness in art" (Rodin 1971, 46-47). This argument was very similar to Hawkins' way of thinking. There was a desire for a return to a classical conception of the true, natural expression of the human body and not the artificial influence of the technological age. While Hawkins' movement was in line with normalcy policies, he rejected the artificiality of mechanization which was a part of the burgeoning consumer culture of the Cold War.

Hawkins rejected mechanization; however, he celebrated and exalted the new field of scientific study: kinesiology. Hawkins felt that "ugliness in the body and in movement is primarily ignorance of the deductively formulated, empirically verified, natural scientific laws of movement, now called the science of kinesiology" (Hawkins 1992, 76). Hawkins celebrated kinesiology because he believed it informed dancers on how they should move their body. While kinesiology was a new scientific field of study, in Hawkins' eyes, it provided confirmation for his movement aesthetics of beauty and natural dancing. Hawkins saw kinesiology as something the body innately understood and attempted to accomplish, but the de-

mands and pressures of Western culture had removed that natural understanding of the way bodies were supposed to move. This confirmation gave Hawkins scientific evidence and the reasoning that he used to continue to perpetuate his agenda of aligning with Cold War policies.

Hawkins participated in these normalcy policies through the creation of what he called the normative technique, or Hawkins technique. He aimed to create a movement technique that was the kinesthetically correct way, or normative way, of moving. Hawkins felt that "when it comes to skill or dance training, you can't base a training against what the nature of the body wants to be" (quoted in Tracy 1997, 66). As a principle, Hawkins was stating that if you were participating in a dance technique other than his own, then you were moving incorrectly. He aimed for "dance that eliminated unnecessary effort, rigidity, and tension" and instead utilized "a system of moving based on the body's natural flow of energy, avoiding all extremes" (Reynolds and McCormick 2003, 371). Through the creation of this technique, Hawkins intended to create a system that could and should be done by all bodies. This aligns with the return to normalcy during the Cold War. As World War II ended, Americans wanted to bring soldiers home and reintegrate them into familial life (Kowal 2010, 22). To reintegrate the soldiers, anything that was extreme was not considered to be a part of traditional lifestyles. In line with this cultural ideology, Hawkins sought to create a normalized way of dancing, which took out the extremes of movement.

Hawkins focused his efforts on creating beauty in both his technique and choreography with clear definitions of what constituted beauty. He defined this beauty as "the equivalent simplicity, clarity, directness, effortlessness, strippedness, in dance movement that I liked in everything else" (Hawkins 1992, 94). This meant that the dancers did not overwork muscles to make movement happen. This concept of finding beauty in moving the body with efficiency and ease created a distinct movement quality. This movement quality is showcased in The Erick Hawkins Modern Dance Technique: Volume 2: Movement Patterns & Aesthetic Applications, which displays standing and across-the-floor work in a Hawkins class. In one exercise, dancers move in a grapevine, a series of steps moving sideways with one foot crossing in front and then behind the other leg. This

movement pattern mimics the intertwining of grapevines. During this movement, the dancers float their pelvises across the floor by lifting their weight into their core, allowing the legs to glide. The float of the pelvis, an important aspect of the Hawkins technique, allows the movement to be done with ease, without overworking the muscles to forcefully make the intertwining leg-work occur. The float of the pelvis in Hawkins' grapevines is just one example of the way ease and efficiency are linked to beauty in Hawkins' work.

While there are many aspects of Hawkins' definition of beauty, at its heart is the concept of decontraction which is the opposite of the harsh and tension-filled contraction found in Martha Graham's technique. In 1950, Hawkins created his school and company. During the same year, he also separated, personally and artistically, from Martha Graham. This separation resulted in hostile rhetoric between the two artists. One of the ways that Hawkins separated himself from Graham was by creating a technique that focused on an effort quality that was the opposite of Graham's technique. Whereas Graham's technique is predicated on bound movement qualities with movement striking out from the abdominal core, the Hawkins technique emphasizes pulling weight into the center to allow for free-flow movement. In contrast to the Graham contraction, Hawkins' decontraction was not a relaxation of the working muscles, but a change in the effort used to move the muscles (Celichowska 2000, 44-51). The goal was to utilize the minimum amount of energy, to be efficient and to not overwork the muscles. This is the opposite of the tension that is required to complete contractions in the Graham technique. This change in effort resulted in the buoyant flow that characterizes the Hawkins technique and choreography. Even with creating a new effort quality for his technique, his movement was not new. Hawkins preached a new, natural, and universal technique, but in reality, was utilizing and manipulating the classwork of Graham to create his own technique.

The manipulation of the Graham technique caused the Hawkins technique class to mimic a Graham technique class. Although Hawkins preached anti-Graham rhetoric, his technique is structured similarly to the Graham technique. Both class sequences start seated on the floor with the legs crossed, though the Hawkins position is more relaxed than the Gra-

ham crossed-legged position. There are also similarities in the floor work of a Hawkins class and Graham class. One such exercise is contractions lying supine (Celichowska 2000, 105). The image of the contraction in The Erick Hawkins Modern Dance Technique is a mirror image of the "Graham contraction." The movement is initiated from the pelvis, the head is thrown backwards, and the arms and hands yearn, or plead, towards the sky. There is a clear connection between the two techniques even though the effort quality and emphasis may be different. This connection occurs because Hawkins is placing Graham on a pedestal of artistic creation, even though he is breaking away from her movement aesthetic, and Hawkins yearns to find a way to achieve this level of achievement (Frank 2012, 94). By utilizing movements reminiscent of Graham's work, he attempted to place himself in the larger conversation of dance modernism.

Graham was considered one of the standard-bearers of modern dance and created an image of universality in dance. In midcentury American concert dance, "universalism signified the idea that all human beings shared essential characteristics regardless of the particularities of their lives or geographic location" (Kowal 2010, 9). While this concept seems idealistic, in reality, it becomes a way to cover up anything or anyone who was deviant from the normative identities of society—what Kowal identifies as white, Western, and heterosexual. By destroying differences and compiling everything under Western ideals, Hawkins neglected the contributions of people and forms considered "Other." Hawkins himself utilized Native American dance to find credibility for the sacredness of the body (Hawkins 1992, 143). This appropriation of Native American culture was found acceptable during this period because Hawkins believed he was taking a "lower" form of art, anything that did not come from a Western tradition, and using that form to create high art. By covering up the contributions of non-Western cultures, Hawkins was continuing to perpetuate the idea of the Western artist as being singular, superior genius that invisibilized artists of other cultures. Hawkins was not the only artist who incorporated and appropriated Native American culture into modern dance to find credibility for artistic creation. The American government has a long history of systematically attempting to Westernize, Christianize, and assimilate Native Americans into American culture (Shea Murphy 2007, 30). This attempt to assimilate Native Americans into the general American culture caused artists to assimilate Native American dance and culture into modern dance. Modern dancers felt that they had a "right to knowledge about Indian people and cultures" and that "they could draw freely [on Native American culture] for their own artistic dance production" (Shea Murphy 2007, 115 and 117). Hawkins, like many other modern dancers, felt it was his right to incorporate the Native American rhythms, male virility, and spirituality into his work. As Hawkins was incorporating Native American culture into his work, he was participating in the continued acculturation of Native American culture into American culture during the 1950s. While his later works such as Plains Daybreak (1979) and Black Lake (1969) evoke Native American culture through costumes, his impetus of using Native American culture to aid his artistic creation happened during the Cold War period.

The universal ideas that pervaded Hawkins' and other artists' work also recognized the transcendence of the white human body onstage. An editor for Dance Observer, Gertrude Lippincott, stated in 1946 that "art deals with timeless and universal themes, not local, transient ones" (quoted in Morris 2006, 6). Art, specifically dance, called for bodies onstage to transcend the everyday existence of man and to showcase a greater purpose for humanity. Hawkins believed that Western culture was "a transcending culture" which "Non-Western peoples" had the inability to experience since they "merely keep re-discovering their unchanging, unhistorical intuition of excellence" (Hawkins 2011, 40). By believing himself to be from a culture that had the ability to transcend the everyday existence of humanity, the dancers in his work did not stand for just one human. The bodies onstage had to be able to showcase the potential that humanity has once it transcends the confines of tradition and low culture. By being in conversation with universalism and transcendence, Hawkins was attempting to place himself in the same choreographic conversation as Graham and other choreographers who received prominent attention at the time.

As a choreographer, Hawkins upheld normative gender and sexual preferences. Parker Tyler, a poet and art critic, stated that "one finds natural manliness

in Hawkins' dancers, but also natural womanliness" (Norton 1973, 24). This can be seen in the partnering and weight sharing that occurs in much of Hawkins' work. In Early Floating (1961), the male dancer captures the woman around the waist, stopping her forward momentum. His grip around her waist brings the woman to standing as he slides his arms to cover her ears. At the same time, the male dancer leans in as if to whisper something in the woman's ear (Hawkins 2000b). The power in this situation is given to the male dancer which places him in control of his partner. His motions to cover her ears, yet also whisper to her, reflect an idea of the man influencing and manipulating the woman. This idea of gendered roles does not change in Hawkins' work, even as the dancers' costumes change. The theme arises if the dancers are in leotards, pants and dresses, or fully masked. While the costumes may seem to be equalizing or eliminating differentiation, in reality, the dancers' movements do not allow for the removal of difference between man and woman.

While Hawkins upheld these normative ideals, he pursued a wider range of movement possibilities and roles for male dancers. He sought to uphold the "authentic" male persona which was the opposite of the aggressive brute male or the balletic cavalier (Reynolds and McCormick 2003, 372). This authentic male was viewed by Hawkins to be able to express a wider range of human emotion. Hawkins began to create new and alternative roles for men in his earliest works such as Stephen Acrobat (1946). In this piece, Hawkins portrays a male Eve who "eats of the Tree of Knowledge" (Franco 2012, 82). This masculinized version of Eve is in contradiction to the feminized male heroes that Graham portrayed in her own work. Hawkins was emulating but also critiquing this feminized version of human emotion. He sought to create a place for male dancers to experience a wider range of human emotions on stage than had been available to him in Graham's company. By portraying himself as a male version of a well-known female character, Hawkins was able to portray those emotions and find acceptability for a man to portray such feelings onstage. The portrayal of men who were able to depict more than a heteronormatively masculine man was one of the few ways that Hawkins challenged the normative ideas of society during the 1950s.

With this desire to find true masculine dance, Hawkins believed that man's transcendence was the key to woman's transcendence. He stated that "not until the men in our dance find not a copied passion, but their own flesh and blood passion, will our dance be good enough, and our women take their rightful place as awakened women" (Hawkins 1992, 58). Hawkins believed that men had to find their true male presence onstage, true human desire. While Hawkins' hope to create a new male persona was beneficial, he did it at the expense of women. He needed men to take women through transcendence and women could not arrive there by themselves. This can be seen in a photo of Hawkins and Carol Conway from Of Love (1971). Hawkins presses his cheek to Conway's stomach which softens Conway's torso and chest towards Hawkins (Norton 1973, 33). By pressing his head into a vulnerable place, Conway's body reacts with feeling or as Hawkins referred to it, sensuousness. In Early Floating, a male dancer slides his hands down the side of the woman's body just inches from her skin. This movement prompts the woman to begin dancing and to arch backwards into her partner (Hawkins 2000a). These examples showcase how Hawkins required the actions of men to help and guide women towards sensuousness and feeling. While Hawkins was challenging the range of emotions for men, he forced women to inhabit the same social construct that society placed them in: the object of the heterosexual gaze.

Through the search of finding his beautiful and natural movement, Hawkins' work explores normative values, positioning himself against the values of concert dance which valued non-normative ideals. In Hawkins' opinion, dancing was supposed to depict the ideals of society such as ideal love, ideal gender, and ideal expression of emotion. Hawkins believed that dance should not showcase ugliness, meaning the problems or hardships of modernity. Due to this belief, Hawkins upheld the normative policies of the Cold War. He choreographed dance that did not question heterosexual love or the transcendence of the human body. By upholding the normative values of Cold War America, Hawkins was contradicting the beliefs of many concert dance artists. Other artists, such as José Limón and Martha Graham, choreographed non-normative values that consisted of homosexuality and masculinized femininity (Kowal 2010, 53). However, Hawkins firmly upheld the normative values of general society, instead of the values of the modern dance culture. This was just the foun-

dation of Hawkins rejection of the values of concert dance and the modern dance canon.

The State Department and dance critics dictated the way modern dance was supposed to look and how modern dance was supposed to communicate with audiences. As Gay Morris argues in A Game for Dancers: Performing Modernism in the Postwar Years, 1945-1960, critics and the State Department created rules for what modern dance should be during the postwar era. Some of the rules for what modern dance should have were abstraction, experimentation, and innovation. With these tenets, Clare Croft asserts, "the state department claimed modern dance as quintessentially representative of and indigenous to the United States" (Croft 2015, 16). Artists were forced to either play into these rules to receive federal funding and critic approval or to break these rules and not receive these benefits. Choreographers such as Graham were the choreographers that critics and the State Department exalted as the quintessential modern dance, meaning quintessential American dance. Hawkins did not follow all of the rules for modern dance which stopped his work from achieving the label of quintessential American dance. Hawkins' notion of beauty rejected drama, sensationalism, and emotionalism which were valued in the modern dance canon. He felt that "art that is only sensation or entertainment is only serving an inadequately conceived function and cheating us of the spiritual food we need to live" (Hawkins 1992, 3). In Hawkins' opinion, dance should teach the audience about life and how to live it, not just for pure enjoyment or entertainment. This belief led to the lack of drama and emotion in many of Hawkins' earlier works. These works, such as Early Floating and Stephen Acrobat, consisted of sparse sets and backdrops, tight clothing and atonal music. These elements relate Hawkins to the early works of Merce Cunningham and Paul Taylor, both choreographers who focused on the form of dance as the function of their choreography. Many of Hawkins' early works also focused on dance being the main function of the choreography, not narrative. While Hawkins exalted the same principles of universalism and transcendence as Graham, he was creating choreography that functioned more similarly to the form as content approach of Cunningham's and Taylor's work. The sparseness of Hawkins' work can be found in how the movement functioned. In an image of Haw-

kins in Stephen Acrobat, his knees bend sharply towards the ground with his heels just barely escaping the floor. He looks upward, arms outstretched with an apple in one hand (Franco 2012, 83). While he holds the apple, the movement and shape of his body are what catches the eye, not his relation to the prop. The belief of dance as a functional element and the most important element of a choreographic work, not narrative or emotion, was fundamental to the creation of Hawkins' choreographic ideology. This belief also placed him in opposition to the ideologies of what modern dance was supposed to look like. By utilizing the form as the function of his choreography, Hawkins was labeled as the vanguard of modern dance. However, because of Hawkins normative beliefs, he did not fit neatly into the vanguard.

By breaking the predetermined rules of modern dance, Hawkins went against prominent dance critic John Martinm who was instrumental in defining the canon of modern dance and made Martha Graham the standard bearer of this canon. His writing carried weight in the dance world and he dictated which choreographers were called the pioneers of modern dance. After reviewing a new Hawkins work, John Brown (1945/1947), Martin stated that "the whole thing, as a matter of fact, comes close to the point of being embarrassing" (Martin 1945, 15). Five years later, Martin similarly stated that Hawkins' piece The Strangler (1948) "is a thoroughly embarrassing piece of ineptitude" (Martin 1950, 23). In both reviews, Martin describes Hawkins' work, which is appearing on the same program as Graham's work, as embarrassing. By describing the work as embarrassing, Martin is insinuating that the work is something Hawkins should be ashamed of or something that is not art. Martin's opinion continued to push Hawkins' work away from the modern dance canon. With Martin being vehemently anti-Hawkins, this made it difficult for Hawkins to be understood or well received by other critics and audiences. This sentiment also ensured that Hawkins would not be written into the modern dance record that Martin created.

While Martin strongly stated his distaste for Hawkins' choreography, many critics also disliked Hawkins' concerts. After watching Hawkins' evening-length work here and now, with watchers (1957), critic Allen Hughes stated that "conventional notions about acts and their consequences and log-

ical progression must be suspended for entry into its strangely detached world where movement is every-thing" (Hughes 1952, 19). Moreover, Clive Barnes stated, "yet here again there was little to engage the heart or mind. One watched with amiable detachment" after watching On Lord of Persia (1965) (Barnes 1965, 16). Again, these two critics use a similar lexicon. The critics describe Hawkins work as detached, not engag-ing the audience, and insinuating Hawkins' disregard for conventional standards of modern dance. Hughes, Barnes, and Martin wanted Hawkins work to fit seam-lessly into the dramatic and emotional work they praised or the objectivist, form as function work they disliked. When Hawkins did not deliver dance that fit within the established mainstream modern dance rules or the rules of the vanguard, the critics openly dis-missed his work. Critics were unable, or unwilling, to understand the movement-driven and normalcy values of the pieces that Hawkins was creating.

Hawkins beliefs place him at odds with the rules of modern dance and the requirements for being toured internationally by the State Department. The State Department exported the work of Martha Gra-ham extensively even though her work went against the normalcy values of the United States. The sexu-ality, feminism, and "eroticism was acceptable when Graham did it" (Croft 2015, 114). Her work chal-lenged values, which made her work anti-communist. Censoring material was linked to communism, which would have gone against the cultural diplomacy of this era which "became a tool of American domination" over other countries (Croft 2015, 12). Due to Hawkins' positioning outside the modern dance canon, Hawkins did not have the choreographic respect, as Graham did, that would have afforded him the ability to be independent with his choreography and still receive federal funding. Instead, Hawkins continued to make work that was outside the modern dance canon, which was not seen as the quintessential American dance that the State Department was looking for. This is one reason that Hawkins failed to receive funding from the State Department. Hawkins' dances would not portray American dominance and American artistic excellence abroad, and his transcendence was not recognizable as universal enough to support the efforts of American imperialism.

Hawkins' choreography and technique are recognizable as modern dance. The white, hetero-sexual, male body transcends modernity. However, Hawkins scraps the sensationalism and emotionalism

that can be found in the work of Martha Graham and other choreographers. While the critics openly rejected Hawkins' earlier works, it cannot be de-nied that Hawkins was attempting to be a part of the larger modern dance canon. His desire to receive this recognition was drowned out by his unwilling-ness to play by the rules that modern dance critics demanded. By toeing the line of upholding normalcy policies but also rejecting dramatic elements in his work, Hawkins falls between the lines of mainstream and the vanguard of modern dance. This has caused Hawkins' work to be rejected by the concert dance canon because he disregarded the values of fellow artists, critics, and the State Department. Not having the recognition from any of these sources, when it was crucial to do so, has caused Hawkins' omission from many conversations of dance modernism. While Hawkins has been minimized in the modern dance canon, his influence and impact are significant to understanding that modern dance is not solely re-stricted to the historical definition of the canon or the vanguard.

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