In the mid- to late-1920s, Martha Graham began to elaborate techniques which would have a long-term impact on the evolution of modern dance. She developed new ways of using energy in movement, which liberated her dancers (exclusively female until 1938) from the constraints on corporeal expression she associated with ‘the puritanical concept of life’ (Graham 1980, 46). Graham’s techniques were focussed on empowerment, and can be described metaphorically in terms of ‘economy’, not simply because of her espousal of the typically modernist aesthetic of paring down and reducing to essentials, but also because of the importance to her technique of ‘economics’ in the sense of regulating the distribution, restraint and expenditure of energy in movement. As French movement researcher Hubert Godard has argued, ‘dance brings into play a body-vector which does not define itself in terms of its structure, but in terms of the ways in which it organises intensity and intentionality’.

In what follows, I shall argue for the central role of economies of energy and their relevance to empowerment in Graham’s early technique and training, seen in the context of American modernism and its gendering. I shall then discuss Rudolf Laban’s analysis of ‘effort’ and later concepts of ‘effort-shape’, and will draw on these ideas in examining three early works (Heretic, 1929, Lamentation, 1930, and Primitive Mysteries, 1931). Finally, I shall assess the usefulness for dance analysis of Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of ‘habitus’ and ‘field’, referring here to Gay Morris’s recent discussion in these pages of ‘Bourdieu, the Body, and Graham’s Post-War Dance’ (Morris 2001), and arguing that Graham’s early work transforms embodied subjectivity and establishes a corporeal ‘philosophy of the dance’.

Having studied at the Denishawn School for six years, and subsequently performed in The Greenwich Village Follies from
1923–5, Graham still had not found the type of dance she was looking for, and set out to devise it herself. Her mentor, the pianist Louis Horst, who had studied in Vienna in 1925, played an important role in introducing her to modernism in other art forms, and also in exposing her to innovations in European dance. Graham wished to situate her dance as ‘high art’, rather than mere entertainment and sex appeal, as was the tendency in Broadway shows. Her evolving approach to movement corresponded closely to modernist trends in other art forms, particularly in terms of economy of means (the stripping away of decorative effects), focus on movement itself as the medium of dance, and drawing inspiration from modern, urban life. It may be significant that when Graham left The Greenwich Village Follies to take up teaching in 1925, she could not afford the fee she would have had to pay to Denishawn in order to be allowed to teach their techniques, which meant that she was constrained to discover new material. Gertrude Shurr has recounted how Graham had to find a technique because she couldn’t pay Denishawn the requisite $500 to use theirs. According to Shurr, she had very little to teach, which meant that she ‘had to do everything eight times’, and she found techniques when she started to do her own dances (The Early Years and McDonagh 1973a, 7). There was no clear separation in this early period between choreography and technique classes: the classes were a laboratory where Graham worked out technical solutions to choreographical problems, which meant that the technique fed the choreography and vice-versa. It was several years before Graham’s distinctive style emerged: her early concert dances were highly derivative of the Denishawn style, and photos show an emphasis on profile and hand gestures which have similarities both with Denishawn work and with Wigman. Graham and her dancers saw pictures of Wigman in books brought back from Austria and Germany by Louis Horst (McDonagh 1973a, 3). In Sunami Soichi’s photo of Graham’s dance, Désir, for instance, premiered in 1926 (Figure 1), she is seen in a Wigmanesque pose, in profile, bending backwards deeply from the waist, head lowered with chin up, arms raised and eyes closed.

Revolt (1927), with music by Honegger, is usually cited as the crucial turning point in Graham’s move towards a new style. However, right from the start of her teaching career, she had been working towards distancing her Denishawn heritage.
The first morning I went into class I thought, I won’t teach anything I know. I was through with character dancing. I wanted to begin, not with characters, or ideas, but with movement. So I started with the simplest – walking, running, skipping, leaping – and went on from there. By correcting what looked false, I soon began creating. I wanted significant movement. I did not want it to be beautiful or fluid. I wanted it to be fraught with inner meaning, with excitement and surge. I wanted to lose the facile quality … Gradually, as I was able to force out the old, little new things began to grow. (Cited in Lloyd 1974 [1949], 49–50)

Graham saw the body as central to experience, being the source of nervous energies and the site of memory traces inscribed through movement. To ascribe to the body such a prominent role in the constitution of subjectivity was a challenge to the subordination of body to mind which was a significant aspect of the Puritan tradition. Puritanism was a formidable force to which Graham’s corporeal values were fundamentally opposed. In her words:

The puritanical concept of life has always ignored the fact that the nervous system and the body as well as the mind are always involved in experience […] Primarily it is the nervous system that is the instrument of experience […]. In life, heightened nerve sensitivity produces that concentration on the instant which is true living […]. Spontaneity […] is due largely […] to a technical use […] of nervous energy. Perhaps what we have always called intuition is merely a nervous system organised by training to perceive. (Graham 1980, 46)

Graham’s paradoxical link between spontaneity and technique is revealing. Spontaneity in performance requires the body instantly, without conscious reflection, to reactivate learned, past experience in the present. It is ‘not essentially intellectual or emotional, but is nerve reaction’, and is ‘dependent on energy, upon the strength necessary to perfect timing’ (Graham 1980, 45). In order to perform ‘action timed to the present moment’, the dancer must possess ‘nervous, physical and emotional concentration’, which can only come about as a result of training (Graham 1980, 46). The fullest level of awareness, of concentration in the present, is a corporeal experience produced by a trained (learned) use of nervous energy, which ‘[frees] the body to become its ultimate self’ (Graham 1980, 45). This ‘becoming self’ of the body was also a becoming self of the embodied subject (here, a female, white North American subject), who would be empowered through this process of self-realisation, since ‘power means to become what one is’ (Graham 1980, 48). Significantly, she contrasted the ‘Negro’ dance, which she characterised as ‘a
dance toward freedom, a dance to forgetfulness, often Dionysiac in its abandon and the raw splendor of its rhythm [...] a rhythm of disintegration’, with Native American (‘Indian’) dance, which was ‘a dance for power’, and which, rather than fostering forgetfulness, was for awareness of life, complete relationship with that world in which he finds himself ... a rhythm of integration’ (Graham 1932, 6, italics mine). She described her dance as ‘the affirmation of life through movement’ (cited in Armitage 1966, 103).

Graham’s technique posed a powerful challenge to behavioural models for young women, especially young women from sheltered backgrounds, who were educated to restrain and repress physical expression of energy. This challenge is forcefully articulated in Dorothy Bird’s autobiography, Bird’s Eye View: Dancing with Martha Graham on Broadway (Bird 1997). Here we learn how Graham reprimanded her dancers for being too polite (“You are all much too polite. You must break this habit of extreme politeness”), encouraging instead ‘fierce energy’ and creating effects of ‘conflict and insolence’. She also declared that smiling was “absolutely out”, the reason being that “it is so often done to please, to indicate subservience or overeagerness”. Instead, the dancers should be “proud and aloof” (Bird 1997, 50–1). Marcia Siegel argues that: ‘Graham gave to these early dancers the gift of power through body image’ (Siegel 1997, x). Bird declared: ‘I embraced the new body image that was being created, not feminine or masculine, but a strong, vibrantly active, independent, disciplined human figure’ (Bird 1997, 47). Bannerman comments on Graham’s early technique as demonstrated by Bonnie and Dorothy Bird in a film made at Bennington College in 1934 that ‘the overall approach [...] shows athleticism, attack and flow, and this quality comes from a deep sense of physicality produced through the rigours of the Graham training of the time’ (Bannerman 1998, 83, italics mine).

More than once, Dorothy Bird refers to the ways in which Graham’s choreography allowed her to experience previously repressed emotions. There was a strong sense of release as far as the performers were concerned. ‘The fierce energy Martha sought was finally there. Its liberating surge charged through me. No longer were we graceful little Greek sylphs; we were down-to-earth women with powerful feelings.’ The dancers learned to generate and release energy at will, but also to contain it. They produced tension in the audience by generating ‘barely visible overtones of
locked-in energy’ (Bird 1997, 51). Graham also emphasised the importance of combining intense energy with clarity of purpose, often through her use of imagery. Bird cites the example of Graham’s transformation of the ‘German-style swings’ which she had learned in Ronny Johansson’s class at the Cornish School. Graham incorporated into the basic swing motion a whiplash movement of the arms, and a powerful forward lunge, telling her students: ‘if you … fling yourselves forward into the lunge with sufficient power, the life force in each of you will burst forth … this force is powerful enough to break a large rock!’ (Bird 1997, 37). Dorothy Bird reports Graham’s reference to projection of energy when executing the swings: “the force is forward and back […] when you go forward, there is a point below your belly button where your energy comes out”. So here we are: we’re going to throw forward and thrust our energy out to the audience’ (Helpern 1999, 11).

Empowerment through modification of habitual movement patterns, which meant using repetition to reconfigure movement memory, was central to Graham’s training. New techniques for directing energy could be learned and incorporated into muscular memory, to be ‘spontaneously’ reactivated in the present moment of performance. Dorothy Bird describes the dancers’ experimentation with rhythms of sobbing, which began with uninhibited exploration of different expressions (she mentions here that ‘Daddy had taught me to repress my sobbing’), until Graham was satisfied that they had fully experienced these rhythms, at which point they moved on to objective, conscious experimentation with the movements they had discovered. This exercise was continued until the new movement material had been incorporated into the dancers’ physical memory. ‘The experience was like that of eating something new. You tasted, swallowed, then digested. The memory was part of you from then on’ (Bird 1997, 49). Bird describes the absorption into muscular memory of feelings of power through movements involving repeated accumulation and release of tension.

Powerful down-UP preparation was followed by a sudden, violent release from the center into a wide aggressive lunge on half-toe with arms still and straight like a spear. Impelled by hip thrusts, the movement lurched from one side through center to the other side […] The heel kept up its insistent beat on the floor, down-UP, down-UP. This went on and on, relentlessly, frenetically,
center-left-center-right, until the brutally heavy, crushing feeling of power was fully established in our muscular memories’ (Bird 1997, 52, italics mine).

For the bold walk in *Primitive Mysteries* the dancers practiced walking in the surf at Long Island. ‘When we returned to the studio we could draw upon the distinct muscular memory we had absorbed through thrusting our whole body forward against the surf then being dragged back by the undertow’ (Bird 1997, 75, italics mine).

Graham was fascinated by the connections between movement and emotion. Her father was a physician who specialised in nervous diseases and mental disorders, and Graham said that in a way her first dancing lessons were watching the ‘strange involuntary movements’ of one of his patients (Walter 1973). Graham’s father famously told her that she could not hide wrong-doing: her movements would give her away, because movement could not lie. This threat was one which Graham remembered throughout her life. Her response to the risk of involuntary revelation of the inmost self through movement was to take control of her own movement by observing closely its minutest links with emotional states, in order to be able to enact emotions at will by performing the appropriate movements. Moreover, the objective nature of the Graham performance style, and the use of the face as a mask, through make-up and impassive expression, liberated the dancer from identification with her usual persona. Bird recounts that after Graham had made her up, she looked into the mirror, ‘and looking out at me was a strange, strong, daring person. No one would ever recognise me’ (Bird 1997, 56). Emotion was provocatively withheld from the audience: the dancers were warned not to show feelings in their faces. In Mark Franko’s words: ‘emotion was not encoded in the work, but in the audience’s reception of the work’ (Franko 1995, 52). Far from being direct expression, Graham’s strategy was a very deliberate construction and staging of emotional effects, which empowered the (female) dancing subject.

Graham wanted her dancers to develop their awareness of the changes which occurred in the body in different states of emotion, and to learn to recognise and interpret the ‘language’ of the body. As Rudolf Laban also argued,6 movement could itself inspire moods. Graham explained: ‘You experiment, you find out, and then it tells you what it means. The movement gives you back very often the meaning. You don’t start “I will express anger”, or “I will
express grief’’. You move in such a way that it gives you back anger or grief’’ (‘Dancemakers’). The enactment of a movement could in itself produce emotion. ‘‘I allow the form of the dance to give me back the certain emotional quality which goes with it. I do not put myself consciously into that mood before the dance’’ (Armitage 1966, 108). This movement-expression relationship was choreographed, not improvised: it could be repeated without any loss of effect, and once the right movement was found, it must be repeated exactly. ‘‘I must be very sure of all my movements. If my hand goes in one place one day it must go exactly the same place next day […] One remembers such movement with one’s body particularly’’ (Armitage 1966, 108). Graham’s training as described by Bird included both extensive use of imagery in order to communicate movement quality and intention, and detailed study of the workings of muscles. It was important for the dancers to understand how muscles worked, and Graham placed tremendous emphasis on the need to ‘feel the movement muscularly’ and on storing movements in ‘muscular memory’ (Bird 1997, 27 and 32). Not only did her dancers perform powerful actions, but they became aware of their muscularly generated ‘feeling of power’ (Bird 1997, 52).

Effects of fragmentation were also central to Graham’s style. She declared that:

There is a ‘break-up’ in the body sometimes, as there is a break-up in sound, or a break-up in colour to intensify the look of a flower on a canvas, or a face. You see not only the line of the face, you sometimes see the hidden forces that have made that face and in a way that is for me the reason for what is called contemporary dance. (Cited in Barnes and Williams 1963, 18)

Siegell describes what she calls ‘echt-Graham of the earliest vintage’ in terms of

the sculptural designs on the body, the controlled flow of movement that is often cut off before completing its path, the flexed-footed, straight-legged jumps where the body pushes its energy into the ground, the violent, angular thrusts into stillness. All of this has a severe, monolithic intensity that even today we find strange and ascetic, and purifying. (Siegell 1971, 184)

This movement quality conveyed pent-up energy. ‘‘The thrust of the energy was to be held in, intensified, never totally given out’’ (Siegell in Bird 1997, xvi). Dorothy Bird reports Graham’s instructions to ‘abstract a stamp – don’t hit the floor’, and to ‘segment:
do a beautiful circle and cut it in this angle’ (*The Early Years*). In choreographing, Graham was extremely attentive to the role of the spectator, and she told her dancers: ‘the objective is to trigger the audience to continue the percussive movement after it is cut off’. Bird affirmed that ‘the percussive quality was important to create a harsh but exciting impact, which projected a feeling of strength of purpose and high energy’ (Bird 1997, 44). The combination of release from repression and increased expenditure of energy, particularly through forceful use of weight,7 with restraint in the manner of execution, stimulated the audience to participate kinaesthetically and to experience movement impulses and increases in energy levels. Indirectly, then, the spectator was enabled to participate in effects akin to those experienced by the dancer.

Graham’s high-energy aesthetic was linked with a strongly masculinist discourse, which extolled the virtues of ‘virility’. She declared that:

[The students] come with all sorts of conventional notions of prettiness, graceful posturing, and what not. My first task is to teach them to admire strength – the virile gestures that are evocative of the only true beauty. I try to show them that ugliness may be actually beautiful, if it cries out with the voice of power. (Cited in Roberts 1928, 65)

Virility, here, is more or less synonymous with powerfulness, and opposed to conventional notions of beauty, predicated on traditionally ‘feminine’ qualities. The values of virility and power were associated with the American modernism of which Graham presented herself as an apostle, referring to “[America’s] monstrous vital rhythms, crude, glowing colours, dynamic economy of gesture, and that divine awkwardness which is ever a part of what is vital, fresh and masculine in the arts” (Graham 1930, 250). Bird described the forceful energy liberated in the dancers by Graham’s technique as a regeneration of ‘movement that had been brought to us from the Old World into a creation with an American sense of power, freedom, and energy’ (Bird 1997, 34). Graham characterised Denishawn exoticism as both un-American and weak,8 but described ‘America’s great gift to the arts’ as ‘rhythm; rich, full, unabashed, *virile*’ (Graham 1932, 5; italics mine).

Agressively masculinist tendencies in American modernism have been seen as a reaction against a ‘feminisation’ of culture in the Victorian era, whose ‘ideology of domesticity elevated the serene and self-possessed woman over the striving and ultimately

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7. The text refers to a note or reference that is not visible in the image.

8. The text refers to a note or reference that is not visible in the image.
self-defeated man’ (Lears 1981, 223). Ann Douglas has characterised American modernism as a matricidal backlash against the all-powerful figure of the Victorian matriarch, arguing that ‘the slaying of the Titaness, the Mother God of the Victorian era, was the most important instigation of the modern urban era’ (Douglas 1995, 292). The preoccupation with ‘Americanism’ itself had its roots in several factors, notably anxiety concerning mass immigration and associated racist attitudes. The first quota act was passed in 1921, and in 1924 the National Origins Act was passed. Culturally, American artists were keen to affirm a distinct American cultural identity, independent of European models. ‘In the 1920s [...] identity for modernists [...] was based on definitions of Americanness. The issue was whether America had a useful identity separate, and different from Europe’ (Corn 1999, 314). Graham’s confidence concerning America’s leading role in defining the new dance and its emancipation from conformity to European codes was part of this wider trend. Bonnie Bird commented in relation to Graham’s early work that ‘there was a kind of cultural nationalism that was very, very important at this time’, and she referred to ‘this whole business of identifying who you were through where you were’, which she linked directly with ‘this business of the architecture of the country, the kinds of nervous tempos of people’ (The Early Years, 1981).

As is well known, in the early decades of the twentieth century, New York became a focal point for the fusion of modernity and nationalism (Corn 1999, 175). By contrast with Europe, ‘America’ (in other words, the United States, frequently conflated with New York, particularly Manhattan) was seen as young, unfettered by its past, and forging into the future. ‘By 1920, the new New York of skyscrapers, bridges and bustling crowds had come to be a big subject for artists on both sides of the Atlantic, so intimately tied had it become to their self-conception as moderns’ (Corn 1999, 184). Marcel Duchamp, who moved permanently to New York in 1915, exhorted his new countrymen to recognise the superiority of American over European paradigms. ‘If only America would realise that the art of Europe is finished – dead – and that America is the country of the art of the future.’ American art critics revelled in this shift of perspective, proclaiming that New York was ‘the art capital of the world’, and that ‘for the first time European artists journey to our shores to find that vital force necessary to a living
and forward-pushing art’ (Corn 1999, 52). Movement and dynamism could be conveyed as much through the formal structures of painting as through overtly dynamic subject matter, and the urban modernity of New York became a catalyst for abstraction. Once in Manhattan, Francis Picabia ‘set about making a series of abstractions based on street energy, jazz, and the city skyline’. He declared that he wanted to find abstract equivalents for New York’s ‘stupendous skyscrapers’ and ‘breathless haste’ (Corn 1999, 63).

The conflation of modernity with Americanism and ‘Manhattanism’ was a strong influence on the gendering of modernism. In the mid-1920s, the painter Alfred Stieglitz (husband of Georgia O’Keeffe), for example, ‘thought the subject [cityscapes] inappropriate for a woman, given how much the city had become a male subject and how much it was tied to machine age advocacy’. He saw New York as ‘a mean and hostile marketplace, masculine in its aggressive streetlife and phallic in its skyscraper figurations’ (Corn 1999, 244). In itself, the ‘elevation of technological principles’ has been seen as a factor in ‘the promotion of “masculine” as opposed to “feminine” values’ (Zabel 1997, 231). The adoption of technological (as in Graham) as opposed to natural (as in Duncan) paradigms for movement in dance already tipped the balance in favour of masculinist aesthetic values. Clearly, Graham’s valorisation of ‘masculine’ movement qualities and their appropriation for women are problematic in terms of feminisms which emphasise and valorise feminine difference. However, Graham wished to challenge an aesthetic of ‘prettiness’ which associated the ‘feminine’ with attractiveness and powerlessness. She was anxious to eliminate what she called ‘the grotesque notion that the art of dance is essentially effeminate’ (Graham 1970, 54). She associated support for women’s liberation with feelings of inferiority, and was insistent that she never wanted to be a ‘women’s liberationist’ (Graham 1991, 25). Her public attitude towards feminism was probably also connected with her anxiety not to be branded as a lesbian. Lynn Dumenil has observed that: ‘the new psychology of sexuality [in the 1920s] made close relationships between women suspect as homosexual. It became increasingly common ... for popular observers to analyse militant feminists as repressed lesbians’ (Dumenil 1995, 138).10 Graham’s explanation for why the women’s movement didn’t interest her was that she had ‘never thought of herself as inferior’. To a woman who assumed she must
have had ‘girlfriends’, because she was ‘such a strong female figure’, she retorted: ‘It is impossible. I have no interest in women. I like men’ (Graham 1991, 26).

The strong tendencies in Graham’s work towards formalism and impersonality may have been influenced by a desire to avoid pigeonholing, as was her contemporary, Georgia O’Keeffe, as a ‘feminine’ artist. The popularising of Freudian psychoanalysis in the 1920s encouraged the view that men and women had different psyches as well as different bodies, and different ways of expressing themselves. ‘Men spoke in thrusting forms; women spoke through curves. Men were cerebral; women were emotional.’ O’Keeffe’s art was judged in relation to the sex of its producer. Paul Rosenfeld declared in 1922 that the “essence of very womanhood permeates her pictures’” (Corn 1999, 241). Graham refused, not only the symbolism associated with femininity – ‘I did not want to be a tree, a flower, or a wave’ – but also the ‘otherness’ culturally attributed to femininity, in favour of a universal, genderless humanity. ‘In a dancer’s body, we as audience must see […] something of the miracle that is a human being, motivated, disciplined, concentrated’ (Graham 1980, 45). For a woman to appropriate this ‘universal’ role was subversive of subordination of the feminine to an allegedly universal male paradigm.

Many commentators have aligned Graham with feminism. The Popular Library edition of Don McDonagh’s biography carries on the back cover a quote from the New York Times: ‘The most militant feminist who ever lived and the most talented. Martha Graham emancipated both women and the dance!’ (McDonagh 1973b). More cautiously, Marcia Siegel described her as ‘an early if undeclared feminist, so early that she couldn’t entirely shake off society’s expectations for her, or the armor of guilt, conflict, repressed violence that society reserves for its female mavericks’ (Siegel 1977, 204). Franko argues convincingly that ‘Graham was not emotivist precisely because she was feminist and purposefully avoided identification with the feminine as powerless’ (Franko 1995, 44). The power of Graham’s female dancers to influence today’s audiences is testified to by Henrietta Bannerman, reviewing the ‘Radical Graham’ programme at the Edinburgh Festival in 1996. ‘It was clear from the overall response that Graham dance still has a relevance for today’s audiences, particularly in the dances that feature the self-sufficiency and empowering of the female’
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(Bannerman 1996, 28). Siegel commented a few years ago on Graham’s early work: ‘Hers was fierce female power, dionysiac joy that was neither provoked nor licensed by gazing males. Energy of such dynamism could be dangerous even today, which is probably why you don’t see it much’ (Siegel 1995, 104).

It is precisely this sense of energetic empowerment, kines- thermatically conveyed, which continues to impact upon audiences of Graham’s early work.12 Her embrace of the aggressive, fast, nervous dynamic and ‘phallic’ architectural space of New York led her to appropriate these characteristics through her movement techniques. Sophie Maslow, one of Graham’s early dancers, said in a panel discussion that in contrast to Duncan, she always associated Graham with ‘city life’. Graham had ‘an uncanny way of feeling the times and what was happening around her’, and ‘the nervous energy, the tall buildings, the sirens of ambulances and the continual racket that goes on – her kind of thing came out of that’ (The Early Years). Whereas the urban space of New York was gendered as masculine and phallic, Graham assimilated its rhythms to the bodies of her female dancers, even using the image of a skyscraper in order to convey to her dancers in some detail how their bodies functioned as a ‘human building’, and asking them to imagine analogies between parts of their own bodies and the skyscraper edifice. Interestingly, she included references to hips and breasts, and gave the instruction: ‘feel your breasts held high’ (Bird 1997, 21). This indicates a desire to appropriate the power of the phallic skyscraper for the specifically female body. Moreover, because energy was generated and channelled from inside to outside, the dancer was seen and felt by the audience to have an impact on the surrounding space, shaping it in accordance with her intention. Gertrude Shurr reports that Graham told her dancers that they had to ‘feel the inner skeleton of the body … the projection of going outward’. They had to ‘not just hop, skip and jump, but move on a stationary base and carve, carve a space for yourself; she would say’ (The Early Years, italics mine). Drawing on accounts given by women who danced with Graham in the early years, Alice Helpern describes Graham’s style. ‘A strong spatial attack was characteristic of Graham’s movement. Space was used to the maximum. Movements were conceived with tremendous breadth, width and height; they covered all levels from the floor to the air’ (Helpern 1994, 14).
In Graham’s technique of contraction and release, movement is initiated from the centre of the body, the pelvis (the centre of weight) and the torso, and carried upward and outward to the extremities, to impact upon surrounding space. The dynamism of this process is generated by both breathing and muscular action. Jane Dudley explained in a 1997 interview with Henrietta Bannerman that:

You have to let your breath forcibly out through your teeth and feel how the spine pushes outwards and lengthens (contracts) and then breathe in and see what your back does as you stretch your spine upwards (release). The thing that makes your breath come out is the pressure from the abdominal muscles and your ribs through your teeth. (Bannerman 1998, 264)

The torso ‘contracts’, tenses and hollows when the dancer presses air out of the body, and ‘releases’ when air returns to the lungs. In her study of connections between yoga and Graham’s contraction and release, Eileen Or points out that in yoga ‘the act of inhaling is negative or passive, since we are merely receiving the life-element of “prana”. Exhaling, on the other hand, is positive and active, because “we are giving, radiating”, distributing the energy we have taken in to all parts of our bodies’ (Or 1995, 206). Through contraction and release, ‘everything started from the gut’, and in [Graham’s] early dances, the effect this had on the audience was both exciting and exhausting’ (Pratt 1995, 50). In a tribute to Graham in 1976, Agnes de Mille referred to the ‘nervous vitality’ of her technique.

Graham thought that effort was important since, in fact, effort is life, and that the use of the ground was vital. … And because effort starts with the nerve-centers, it follows that a technique developed from percussive impulses that flowed through the body and the length of the arms and legs, as motion is sent through a whip, would have enormous nervous vitality. These impulses she called contractions.13

Here, rather than being subjected to external pressures, the body generated its own pressure from within (through expulsion of air and muscular contraction). This production of energy and its projection outwards challenged repression and containment of physical expression of emotions.

Rudolf Laban’s analyses of ‘effort’ qualities characterise movement in terms of economies of energy which are very pertinent to Graham’s work. Effort analysis takes as its starting point the behaviour of moving subjects, rather than abstract parameters.
of movement, and therefore links movement with embodied subjectivity. Laban described movement with reference to degrees of acquiescence or resistance to what he called the ‘motion factors’ of weight, space, time and flow, on a spectrum ranging from ‘indulging in’ to ‘fighting against’. The ‘effort elements’ comprise both a motor impulse and an ‘inner’ attitude or effort. ‘The impulse given to our nerves and muscles which move the joints of our limbs originates in inner efforts’ (Laban 1963, 26). The muscular activity of ‘resisting’ or, by contrast, ‘yielding to’ weight, space, time and flow produces different movement qualities which correspond to ‘inner’ attitudes towards these motion factors. For instance, the quality of flexible, expansive movements (as opposed to direct, linear ones) denotes an attitude of yielding to space. Weak movements, with muscular relaxation (as opposed to forceful deployment of one’s weight to make an impact on the environment) correspond to an attitude of indulgence in weight.14 The quality of sustained, unhurried (as opposed to rapid) movement is associated with yielding to time, while loose, unrestrained (as opposed to ‘bound’) movement, is associated with yielding to flow. ‘A movement can be considered as bound when its prevailing attitude is the readiness to stop’ (Laban 1963, 75). The sense of power generated by ‘release’ following contraction can be intensified where speed and strength of execution of movement (projecting and expending energy) are combined with bound flow (containing and preserving energy), thereby maintaining high levels of tension and suspense.

Laban associated the word ‘effort’ with ‘the very fact of the spending of energy itself’ (Laban 1980, 169), and maintained that ‘effort-rhythm should be regarded as an essential peculiarity of the flow of energy’ (Laban 1971, 47). He argued that ‘rhythm could be rationally best explained as an alternation of stresses or more intensive effort-qualities with less intensive ones’ (Laban 1971, 23, italics mine). The relationship between effort and relaxation brings into play an ‘economy of energy’ (Laban 1963, 53). The more recent concept of ‘effort-shape’ analysis grew directly out of Laban’s ideas.15 Bartienneff and Davies describe ‘shaping’ as ‘the way the body sculpts itself in space, and gives form to kinetic energy’ (Bartenieff and Davies 1965, 12). Effort-shape analysis explores the connections between ‘the spatial fluctuations of shape flow and the way kinetic energy is discharged in kinetic flow’
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(Bartenieff and Davies 1965, 8). ‘Effort flow’ is complemented by ‘shape flow’, which is described as ‘the continuous change in the form or spatial relationship of body parts either towards or away from each other’. There are connections between ‘the spatial fluctuations of shape flow and the way kinetic energy is discharged in effort flow’ (Bartenieff and Davies 1965, 8). In effort-shape theory, ‘the intensity of the movement in terms of space-force-time is considered as important as the form of the movement’ (Bartenieff and Davies 1965, 33).

Graham’s hard-edged, modernist style first began to attract attention in Revolt, 1927 and in Immigrant (Steerage/Strike), 1928 (Figure 2). Effort, tension, and conflictual dynamics were now highlighted as the principal material of the dance. Deborah Jowitt remarked in 1977 that ‘Graham, until very recently anyhow, wanted her movement performed with tremendous tension. One set of muscles inhibited or restricted another’ (Jowitt 1977, 72). According to Marian Horosko: ‘in movement across the floor, as in walking or running, the body had to appear to be pushing through a heavy mass, much like the pressure confronted when walking through water’ (Horosko 1991, 65). Cecily Dell notes that:

in terms of dynamics, Graham movement made visible the gradations of tension that are part of modern experience. Where movement had been light, effortless, Graham introduced strong, often direct movement and bursts of quickness, often accompanied by a boundness of the energy that created high intensity dynamics’ (Dell 1966, 21).

Movement was deliberately heavy and earthbound, using weight as a dramatic force. Bird recounted that: ‘Martha told us that when we move, the audience must feel the muscles thrusting against the resistance of our weight’ (Bird 1997, 34). As is well known, there was great emphasis on floorwork and the expressiveness of the torso. Falls replaced leaps, and turn-out gave way to parallel legs and taut, flexed feet.

In Heretic (1929), Graham’s first choreography with her Dance Group, we can already see clearly the predominant ‘effort’ characteristics of her dance, as described by Billie Lepczyk.

Looked at through the Laban perspective, the suffering and struggle within the Soul of Graham’s dancing figure is visualised through an investment of energy that stresses the elements of bound flow, strength, sudden and direct …
Fig. 2. Martha Graham in her dance *Immigrant (Steerage/Strike)* (1928). Photographer: Soichi Sunami. Photo used by permission of Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.
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the dynamics are reflected throughout the whole body, which magnifies the projection of emotion. (Lepczyk 1989, 47)

The extreme economy of this dance extends from the costuming (a simple white dress for Graham and dark tunics for the rest of the group), through the music (a simple Breton tune repeated eleven times), to the choreography. The dance explores the gradual and relentless crushing of a nonconformist individual (Graham) by a domineering (perhaps Puritan) group. The percussive quality of the movement is accentuated by the use of contractions, by execution with bound flow, and by the rhythms of the very simple, repetitive tune. Tension is created largely by the tempo and weight of the movement and the counterpoint of individual and group. The group moves in geometrical shapes, sometimes splitting into assymmetrical formations performing contrasting actions; for instance, two or three groups of dancers confronting the isolated Graham figure, with the separate groups reaching different heights, in bending, standing, or leaning positions.

A great deal of emphasis is placed on effects of weight: in a frequently repeated movement, the members of the group, stiffly erect and with folded arms, feet together, rise on their toes and descend rapidly and heavily onto their heels. The use of raised arms with clenched fists creates a sense of strength and menace, enhanced by the lighting design, which produces long shadows. Transitions between postures are abrupt, creating an automated, machine-like effect which heightens the feel of relentless ruthlessness. Anger as well as despair is suggested by the muscular tension and twisting movements of the principal figure and by the clenching of her fists. This figure conveys a strong sense of contained intensity, like a coiled spring. (In the 1986 reconstruction of Heretic, where Takako Asakawa performed the principal part, Asakawa’s movement appears more peripheral and more superficially dramatic than in Graham’s own performance, where the movement impetus, which is both understated and intense, clearly emanates from the pelvis and torso to the peripheries.)

We can see here Graham beginning to work with ideas which would later lead to her famous technique of the ‘spiral’ fall. Jowitt describes Graham’s adaptation of the ‘twist’ between the direction of the feet and that of the upper body in Egyptian friezes. In her famous fall sequences, she arrived at a position in which the arms opened in one direction, while the knees remained pressed
together, hips averted from the focus of the reaching arms. An agonised and somehow reticent posture’ (Jowitt 1977, 71). Here Graham falls, starting with her back to the audience and developing a twist in her torso as she sinks downwards in a contraction, but the tension is released as her body suddenly crumples and she lies on the ground. Bannerman notes that at times in Heretic, ‘Graham uses the contraction principle to show a deeply hollowed torso and in the context of the group’s menacing solidarity this strong, concave body design signifies the Heretic’s vulnerability’ (Bannerman 1998, 108).

In Lamentation (1930), flexible, expanding movements, which, in ‘effort’ terms, denote a passive ‘yielding’ to space, are impossible because of the constraints imposed by the tube of jersey which sheaths the body, and which the dancer resists with her thrusting gestures. Here, the notion of making breathing (an ‘inner’ function in both anatomical and emotional terms) visible in the movement of contraction and release takes on a new dimension. The dancing figure, whose feet are firmly rooted to the ground for most of the dance, is encased in a tube of lavender jersey, which is stretched into folds as the dancer strains to move inside it. This artificial ‘skin’ is a membrane which expands and contracts in rhythms of effort shape, in accordance with inner tensions. Marcia Siegel refers to Graham’s exploitation of ‘the tensions that can be created when the body works against itself, twisting into dissonant shapes or defying the stabilising centre of gravity’ (Siegel 1971, 195–6). These tensions are enacted here in the fabric of the costume itself. May O’Donnell, one of Graham’s early dancers, said of Lamentation (1930): ‘You couldn’t move very much, but you could get dynamic oppositions of lines, of pull in the body and the tensions of lines that made it – like a piece of sculpture’ (Tobias 1981, 79). In Siegel’s words:

The minute [Graham] starts to move, the tube gets pulled into diagonals that cross the center of her body; as she tugs asymmetrically in opposition to the rounded forms of her back, her head, her arching rib cage, the jersey converts the energy of stress and distortion into visible shapes and lines. (Siegel 1985, 39)

The spatial constraints imposed by the close-fitting costume increase the ‘effort’ component of movement, thereby intensifying the audience’s awareness of energy expended in conflict between internal impetus to move and external restraints. Lepczyk notes
that: ‘the diagonal tensions hold the most drama of all spatial pulls because … each diagonal pull consists of vertical, horizontal and sagittal tensions’ (Lepczyk, 1989, 52–3). *Lamentation* is also an extremely tactile dance: not only does the foregrounding of the fabric suggest touch, but the dancer touches her own face with the fabric in an evocative but ambiguous gesture. Her face, however, is completely impassive throughout, producing tension between expression and denial of emotion.

*Primitive Mysteries* (1931) was undoubtedly the most acclaimed of Graham’s early works. The programme notes described it as ‘literally a celebration of the coming of age of a girl. It has its beginnings in the adoration of the Virgin as experienced in the Southwestern, Spanish-American culture’ (Rogosin 1980, 40). It premiered in February 1931, and received thirty-two curtain calls. John Martin reported in the *New York Times* in February 1931: ‘at the conclusion of her *Primitive Mysteries* […] the majority of the house burst into cheers. It was not just a scattering of “bravos” […] but was the expression of a mass of people whose emotional tension found spontaneous release’ (Martin 1931, 4x). Gertrude Shurr, one of the original dancers, declared that ‘[Graham] generated a light around her. The audience all stood up, they yelled, they screamed. It was just a tremendous thing’ (McDonagh 1973a, 20). In the *New York Herald Tribune*, Mary Watkins described ‘Primitive Mysteries’ as ‘the most significant choreography which has yet come out of America […] it achieves a mood which actually lifts both spectators and dancers to the rarefied heights of spiritual ecstasy’ (Freedman 1998, 69–70). Jack Anderson affirmed that: ‘Indeed, if I were asked to name what I considered the greatest single work by an American choreographer, I would probably answer *Primitive Mysteries*, a dance which miraculously balances restraint and rapture’ (Anderson 1967, 25).

*Primitive Mysteries* has all the intensity and spareness of *Heretic*, but with greater subtlety and complexity.

Again, the ensemble delineates geometric structures in space to frame a lyrically vulnerable but valiant heroine – the Virgin […] But in the formations of *Primitive Mysteries*, the line is now richly augmented by the circle, and both vocabulary and detail of design are greatly expanded. The splendour of the piece lies in the way the structural formality just barely contains the emotion and thus intensifies it. (Tobias 1991, 80)

The dance, in three parts (‘Hymn to the Virgin’, ‘Crucifixus’ and
‘Hosanna’) is highly ritualistic. Graham wears a white flowing
dress, the other dancers are in dark blue. In each of the three
sections, the dancers form and re-form into different config-
urations, creating contrapuntal, moving patterns, which act as a foil
to the soloist, a regal figure, who moves with authority, and the
only figure who moves alone. The contrapuntal formations are
especially noticeable in the ceremonious entrances and exits,
which take place at the beginning and end of each section. For
instance, when the dancers first enter, they form an open ‘square’,
with the row of dancers furthest from the audience forming
a horizontal line and two other rows extending towards the
audience, forming vertical lines, with Graham in the centre. They
all walk slowly and purposefully in the same direction (from right
to left), but the lines move at different speeds. For the second
entrance, the dancers again walk on in horizontal and vertical
rows, but then the angles of the rows change to diagonals, which
move in different directions, creating an effect akin to an abstract
painting in motion, or to moving architecture. In the third
entrance, the dancers begin by walking from right to left, in two
horizontal rows composed of five dancers, and Graham with one
other dancer beside her. Direction and pace change when the
row of five nearest the back of the stage, and Graham and her
companion, turn to face the audience and move quickly forward,
while the row nearest the front turns away and walks to the back.

These processions are performed in silence, and ‘all have halting
rhythms and a weightiness to them’, where the dancers walk on a
contraction, and ‘take one step and then pause, then step again
with the same foot’ (Burt 1998, 185). I referred above to Bird’s
description of training for this walk, at Long Island: ‘thrusting our
whole body forward against the surf, then being dragged back by
the undertow’ (Bird 1997, 75). The manner of executing the walk
foregrounds the effort element of weight as pressure or force. The
movement style, as well as the absence of men, denotes female
self-sufficiency and strength, especially in the repeated sequences
where the dancers perform powerful weighted leaps and circle
around Graham. Here, the body weight is projected strongly
forwards and downwards through the leg, while the arms are
immobilised.

Travelling in a circle with the supporting leg in a low plié and torso bent
forward, the dancers unfold one leg and spring onto it. The arms are held to
the back of the body with the elbows pushed back ... The jump gathers speed gradually until the dancers are leaping or running quite fast around the stage in a circular pathway. The event is extraordinary in terms of primitivism and power and may have been borrowed or adapted from the Mexican-Indian dance vocabulary. (Bannerman 1998, 56)

Siegel remarks that ‘the women ... act out the grief and compassion and exaltation without male intermediaries to do it for them or delineate the forms of their worship’ (Siegel 1997, 206). Graham took here the daring option of using clearly ‘feminine’ figures (as marked by full-skirted dresses and loose hair) to enact generic human and even divine roles. Interestingly, to my knowledge, this aroused no opposition, perhaps because it was so successful as to go almost unnoticed. It does not even appear at all incongruous when, in the ‘Crucifixus’ section, Graham’s role evokes the crucified Christ. Apart from the titles of the sections and some basic symbolism, the ‘ritual’ element is itself generic. As Susan Manning has said: ‘Ultimately no allegory can account for the plot. *Primitive Mysteries* became the abstraction of religious rituals’ (Manning 1991, 10). The ‘Primitive’ in the title is extremely significant. It signalled a desire to return to the roots of ritual, its most elemental and universal forms, but this ‘primitivism’ was also modern, in that America itself was a nation then forging its own cultural identity. Graham declared in 1932 that ‘we, as a nation, are primitive also – primitive in the sense that we are forming a new culture’ (Graham 1932, 6).

Graham felt an affinity with the Penitente Indians of New Mexico, to whose culture and ritual dances she was strongly attracted. The Penitente Indians had been converted to Catholicism in the seventeenth century, but had also retained aspects of their own rituals. In 1931, Martin hailed *Primitive Mysteries* as the first ‘genuine masterpiece of white man’s dance created under Indian influence’ (Dixon-Stowell 1984, 26). Recent discussions have been more critical of this association.19 However, Ramsay Burt argues that Graham (unlike Denishawn) did not conceal differences, but was open about the modern, Western origins of the piece, and that ‘through her seriousness, [Graham] expresses a great respect for what she imagines to be Penitente mores, although she undoubtedly misrepresented these by mediating them in assimilationist terms’ (Burt 1998, 188–9). It is paradoxical that Graham should have been drawn to a movement practice
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whose ascetic base had affinities with the puritanical approach of which she was so critical. However, a crucial difference was that the ascetic element of dance ritual worked through the body, rather than privileging the mind at the expense of the body and the nervous system.

By integrating (as Duncan had done before her) everyday movement material, such as walking, into her choreography, Graham ensured that her innovations engaged directly with general movement habits as well as with the conventions of dance. This introduced the possibility, indirectly for spectators as well as directly for performers, of producing alterations in what French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu has termed the ‘habitus’. The usefulness to dance studies in general, and to analysis of Graham’s post-war dance in particular, of Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of ‘field’, ‘habitus’, and ‘bodily hexis’, has been cogently argued by Gay Morris (Morris 2001), whose discussion contains admirably lucid and focussed analyses of Bourdieu’s ideas. Morris emphasises the importance of Bourdieu’s argument that there exists ‘a bodily intelligence that lies outside the realm of conscious reason’ (Morris 2001, 57). Bourdieu is referring here to embodied behaviour which has become habitual: ‘the “habitus” – embodied history, internalised as a second nature and so forgotten as history’ (Bourdieu 1990, 56). This internalised behaviour is at the heart of subjective identity.

The body … does not represent what it performs, it does not memorise the past, it enacts the past, bringing it back to life. What is ‘learned by body’ is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is. (Bourdieu 1990, 73, emphasis mine)

The ‘habitus’ is also open to the future and to change. It has ‘an infinite capacity for generating products’, although the limits of change are set by ‘the historically and socially situated conditions of its production’ (Bourdieu 1990, 55). Social ‘fields’, which are the sites of struggles for status and domination, are peopled by agents whose ‘habitus’ is suited to that field (e.g. dancers’ training equips them for the dance field). The requirements of the field to anticipate and deal with new situations stimulate the ‘habitus’ to respond through ‘strategies’ which build on the basis of past experiences, without the necessity for conscious reflection. ‘Strategies’ are ‘the ongoing result of the interactions between the dispositions of the “habitus” and the constraints and possibilities which are the reality
of any given social field’ (Jenkins 1992, 83). In the case of the literary or other cultural fields, Bourdieu argues that:

the impetus for change … resides in the struggles that take place in the corresponding field of production. These struggles, whose goal is the preservation or transformation of the established power relationships in the field of production, obviously have as their effect the preservation or transformation of the structure of the field of works, which are the tools and stakes in these struggles. (Bourdieu 1993, 183)

Power struggles in the field of production, then, are seen by Bourdieu as the driving force behind artistic change, where works of art function as ‘tools’ or ‘stakes’. Morris explains Graham’s decision in the 1940s to adopt elements of ballet form and technique, and to incorporate narrative, with reference to power relations in the field of dance production, where ‘both commercialism and ballet were seen as imperiling the existence of modern dance’ (Morris 1990, 60). Similarly, ‘a turn to myth and the unconscious was logical both in terms of Graham’s habitus and as a strategy for retaining vanguard status’ (Morris 1990, 62). Features of Graham’s early period could be evaluated in a similar fashion, e.g. in a field of production where modern dance sought to distinguish itself at once from the exotica of Denishawn (including its seductive images of femininity) and from Broadway entertainment, Graham’s exploitation of ‘primitive’ Penitente influences and her espousal of features of modernist aesthetics (as discussed above) positioned her as ‘American’ and aligned her with avant-garde, ‘highbrow’ modernist art. In this respect, Graham’s innovations can be seen as ‘strategies’ involving the adaptation of her ‘habitus’ as a dancer and choreographer to the requirements of the dance field. But however successful these ‘strategies’ were in establishing Graham’s reputation as a choreographer, her works in this period do not function simply as ‘stakes’ or ‘tools’ relative to struggles in the field of production, because their active role in the transformation of ‘habitus’ has wider implications.

More than any other art form, dance has the potential to alter ‘habitus’. As discussed above, Graham’s training aimed to produce effects of empowerment by reconfiguring movement memory and creating new effort paradigms which could be reactivated in performance. The stimulus for these changes and the significance of their impact on ‘habitus’ extend beyond the field of dance production. Learning new ways of regulating the distribution and

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expenditure of energy in the body, such as I have discussed in Graham’s training, involves mobilising ‘effort’ qualities which are inseparable from ‘intentionality’, the goal or project of embodied consciousness, thereby redefining the potential of embodied, gendered subjectivity. Indeed, not only Graham, but also other choreographers who have developed innovative movement systems, can produce the effect on their dancers of reconfiguring the body’s habitual effort patterns, its ‘economies of energy’. Godard argues that major choreographers, ‘all of those who have made something very strong emerge’, establish a corporeal ‘philosophy of the dance’. Such choreographers ‘have in common this immensely long period of work with the dancers: a daily working regime by means of which the philosophy of the dance gradually infiltrates the symbolic circuits, and passes into the deep strata of the non-verbal’ (Godard 1996, 17–18).21 Graham undoubtedly comes into the category of choreographers who have established a corporeal ‘philosophy of the dance’. The ‘habitus’ is inseparable from cultural norms, and the particular innovations brought about by the impact of individual choreographers on economies of energy have socio-historical dimensions. Graham aimed to train her dancers to be fully aware of their muscular activity and to distribute, restrain and expend energy at will, controlling their own ‘economies’ of energy. Like native American dance, Graham wanted her work to be ‘a dance for power’, where the body was freed to ‘become its ultimate self’ (Graham 1980, 45). The spectator should also be enabled to experience these effects, thereby fulfilling Graham’s aim:

   to impart the sensation of living, to energise the spectator into keener awareness of [...] the wonder of life; to send the spectator away with a fuller sense of his own potentialities and the power of realising them, whatever the medium of his activity. (Cited in Armitage 1966, italics mine)

NOTES

1 Laurence Louppe, in Godard 1996, 13.
2 Graham first studied there in the summer of 1916, but did not join the school full time until a year later.
3 Dorothy Bird recounts her experiences of auditioning for Broadway shows after she left Graham’s group, where dancers were chosen on the basis of their looks rather than their talent. ‘Although this was supposed to be a dance audition, we were never asked to dance a single step. The choreographer was not present and had no say whatsoever in the preliminary selection process’ (Bird 1997, 137–8).
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5 On Puritanism and its significance in relation to the evolution of modern dance in the US and in relation to Graham in particular, see Thomas 1995.

6 ‘Movement can inspire accompanying moods, which are felt more or less strongly according to the degree of effort involved.’ Rudolf Laban, Modern Educational Dance. London: Macdonald and Evans, 1963 [1948], 102.

7 See below for discussion of Rudolf Laban’s theories of ‘effort’.


11 On this topic, see also Mark Franko, Dancing Modernism/Performing Politics. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995, 43ff.

12 It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss changes which took place later, notably with the introduction of male dancers.

13 Programme note, Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, 19 July 1976.

14 Laban’s use of the category of ‘weight’ can be ambiguous, and is sometimes replaced by other terms such as ‘pressure’ or ‘force’, indicating that the weight in question is that of a moving subject, not an inanimate object. See Cecily Dell, A Primer for Movement Description using Effort-Shape and Supplementary Concepts (New York: Dance Notation Bureau, 1970), and Carol-Lynne Moore and Kaoru Yamamoto, Beyond Words: Movement Observation and Analysis (London: Gordon and Breach, 1988).


16 Compare Bird’s reference above to practising walking in the surf at Long Island.

17 The spiral is described by Helpern as ‘the turn of the pelvis, back and head around a vertical spine. Dramatically, the spiral sets up counter tensions within the torso’ (Helpern 1994, 24).

18 See the outstanding photographs of this dance in Barbara Morgan, Martha Graham: Sixteen Dances in Photographs (New York: Dobb’s Ferry, 1980).

19 ‘There was no authentic replication of Native American culture in this work. The ritual quality of the dance was set up by the processional; by Horst’s score – based on Native American themes; by the stark, narrow, dark blue dresses of the “movitaites” in contrast to the stiff, wide, white, cake-like gown of the Virgin; and by the ritualised gestures in the choreography – including the positions of the Virgin’s hands and arms in angular, stylised poses, and the thumping feet of the chorus’ (Dixon-Stowell 1984, 6). Aspects of this style were almost certainly influenced by Stravinsky’s Le sacre du printemps, in which Graham had danced the leading role.

20 The forgotten historical dimension is social as well as individual. What Bourdieu describes as a ‘durable way of standing, speaking and walking’ embodies a way of ‘feeling and thinking’ which is strongly influenced by shared cultural norms. Bourdieu also
emphasises that the ‘habitus’ is closely related to time and to language, and cannot be reduced to a ‘body image’ or even a ‘body concept’ (Bourdieu 1990, 72).

In Graham’s case, it is well known that her dancers worked immensely long hours with her and that she forbade them to attend ballet classes. When her dance group went to Bennington College for the summer in 1935, she even forbade them to mingle with the members of any other dance groups (Bird 1997, 103).

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Heretic. Videotape in Dance Collection of New York Public Library. Chor-
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Primitive Mysteries. Film in Dance Collection of New York Public Library. Choreography by Martha Graham (1931), reconstructed by Martha Graham; music by Louis Horst; danced by Yuriko and members of the Martha Graham Company, 1986. A Connecticut College School of Dance Archive Film, produced and filmed by Dwight Godwin.

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