

## Queering the Skeleton in Dance's Closet

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This article explores the little-known role a human skeleton played in the queering and shaping of dance modernism. The stage, rather than the classroom, is usually looked to as a prime site for tracing developments of modernism, racism, and enactments of queer subjectivities in dance. However, in the early decades of the twentieth century, an important intervention propelling dance toward a modernist aesthetic while disrupting the regulatory norms of binary gender construction, began in a women's college gymnasium via a skeleton. Seemingly unmarked and innocuous, this skeleton was, in fact, overwritten with the cultural, gender, and racial conflicts of the time. Two impulses generate this inquiry: one that traces the history and symbolic formulations of nationalism, race, and gender that followed skeletons into the university as they anchored conceptualizations of the dancing body; and another that locates the intervention of a queer body linked to whiteness in dance through this use of the skeleton to challenge dance's heteronormative practices and pedagogies that preserve the status quo. Following Clare Croft, I am using *queer* as something that positions itself against the norm and, particularly in regard to lesbianism, as a strategy that presents alternative possibilities for how women appear in public (Croft 2017, 120–121). With recent calls for reparative inquiry into racialist lineages in the archives of dance education, as well as increasing scholarship tracing the role of performance in the emergence of modern sexual identities, such an examination is timely and urgent (McCarthy-Brown and Carter 2019; Croft 2017).<sup>1</sup> H'Doubler's pedagogic interventions with the skeleton as initially unmarked and inviting different readings of gender depending on one's position would eventually lead to a legacy of queer dance modernism that was implicitly white.

In the summer of 1917, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, dance entered academia through an introductory dance class taught by a twenty-eight-year-old physical education teacher: Margaret H'Doubler. H'Doubler shared the front of the classroom that day with a curious prop, a human skeleton suspended on a stand.<sup>2</sup> This course would become legendary as the first dance class at any American university (Ross 2000, 10). Whereas the educational legacy of H'Doubler's pedagogy is

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well established, the importance of this central prop she used in her initial class, which was present in the majority of classes she would teach over the next sixty-eight years, has never been explored (Ross 2000). This article uses new archival and cross-disciplinary research to argue that this skeleton had a pivotal role in leading to the impersonal, the decentered subject, and anti-narrative strategies that prefigured main strands of dance modernism and dance's openness to nonconforming gender expression while maintaining its links to whiteness. At the same time, a human skeleton was part of the arsenal of artifacts, diagrams, test results, and computations that eugenicists employed in their racist, anti-immigration legislation flourishing in the 1917–1924 period. Thus, a human skeleton was far from an innocent object when H'Doubler chose to use it as an implicit medium of social critique.

Refusing conventional womanhood, motherhood, and a traditional heterosexual marriage, she disidentified with gender normativity in favor of a queer sororal femininity. Contrary to implicit social pressures of the era, H'Doubler bobbed her hair, did not marry until she was in her forties, never had children, and lived apart from her husband for long periods. Several of H'Doubler's early students suggested that her late-in-life marriage to art teacher Wayne Claxton, who was twelve years her junior, may well have been a "lavender marriage," an early twentieth-century arrangement to conceal homosexuality. For the majority of the marriage, Claxton, who had previously taught in the University of Wisconsin Art Education Department, resided in Detroit, where he chaired the Art Department at Wayne State University from 1936 to 1959. Claxton, frequently accompanied by a male companion, would join H'Doubler for weekends at a home they shared in Door County outside Madison, Wisconsin (Nagel 1997; Halprin 2019).

The anatomical body that H'Doubler brought into dance in the form of the skeleton had only recently emerged in the nineteenth century as part of a rapidly expanding project of the anatomical acquisition, dissection, representation, and display of medicalized bodies (Sappol 2002, 15). In museums and medical schools, the dissection, depiction, and display of images and the ephemera of bodies was used to link anatomy to the making of the raced, modern, and classed American self. Anatomy had evolved significantly from the mid-eighteenth century and across the nineteenth century into an increasingly prestigious and authoritative practice. Prior to this, working with dead bodies was seen as defiling both the anatomist and the unfortunate soul whose body had been secured, legitimately or illegitimately, for dissection. Elizabeth Stephens, in tracing the history of anatomy, notes that until the mid-1800s, anatomical study was the object of widespread opprobrium. Not only was dissection believed to defile the physical integrity of the body, but the bodies used were either literally stolen from graves or restricted to the destitute and those condemned to capital punishment (Stephens 2011, 5). Stephens has noted that "only after the passage of the Anatomy Act of 1832, which made cadavers for medical dissection more readily available by allowing public charitable institutions to sell unclaimed bodies, or those whose families were unable to pay for their burial, to anatomy schools, did anatomy begin to redefine its cultural position" (Stephens 2011, 5). The more restricted and regulated these anatomical performances of dissection became, historian Michael Sappol argues, the more "anatomical dissection, far from being butchery, was the quintessential epistemology of scientific, 'civilized' man, a systemic and careful division and reduction of the material world, a triumph of mind over matter, reason over emotion" (2002, 6). He traces this to what he calls "a geography of embodiment," in which anatomical knowledge was seen as producing "morally ordered, physiologically self-governed 'individuals'" and by extension, "a morally ordered, physiologically self-governing society" (2002,6). Thus, in the decades before H'Doubler created that first dance class in the university, extending back to the late eighteenth century and across the nineteenth century, the body, anatomy, defilement, death, and social regulation were intertwined in the United States. Class, race, and gender were negotiated across these boundaries of dissection. The dynamic between those who did dissections, primarily educated white males, and the cadavers they dissected, usually drawn from the deceased bodies of the poor, Black people, criminals, prostitutes, the Irish, indigents, and Native Americans, reproduced the racial, gender, and class hierarchies of the living (2002, 2).

H'Doubler herself elided discussion of the skeleton outside of the classroom. She effectively never referenced it in her many published books and writings, despite the fact that photographs document she requested a skeleton also be present in her guest lectures at other colleges. Where the skeleton *does* figure prominently in her writings is her unpublished private documentation of her actual teaching inside the private space of the university dance studio.<sup>3</sup> Her personal papers suggest that rather than being secretive, she simply viewed the skeleton pragmatically. On one level, it was the means to an end for herself professionally: a way to sidestep the fact that she lacked the actual movement training to be an inspirational live demonstrator for her students. At the same time, it was her uniquely generic medium for addressing students' bodies. Through it she gave them agency to find motion in their individual bodies. What is obvious, however, is also just how essential the skeleton was in allowing her to displace the dominant mimetic tradition of dance training as imitation of a mentor. "She wanted us to avoid being imitative. She avoided mimicry," Mary Hinkson, her student in the 1940s, recalled. "She just totally disapproved of everybody looking alike in the class" (Ross 2000, 172). H'Doubler's teaching notes reveal detailed multiple handwritten drafts of her painstakingly crafted lectures about the skeleton and its relevance to dance, revealing just how methodically she traced the origins of movement from the body's bones outward, crafting the language and performative manipulation of this prop to shape it as a classroom heuristic for dance students.<sup>4</sup> Photographs of her teaching with the skeleton always reveal it sharing the front of the classroom with her in a position of prominence and visibility, ostensibly unmarked yet overdetermined with competing discourses as a consciously shaped heuristic, an artifact of fading histories. (Photo 1)

Although the skeleton was an oddity in a dance studio, it was a too familiar object in medical, ethnographic, and eugenicist communities. In these contexts, it was used to bolster essentialist arguments about race and gender, leaving open questions about what a human skeleton's presence in early dance education unintentionally transmitted. Perhaps because she had never trained in dance herself, nor had she ever performed, H'Doubler needed the skeleton as a proxy for her own non-dancing body—demonstrating the mechanics of human motion on it in front of her students rather than modeling all the movements herself. H'Doubler had this task of teaching dance thrust upon her when Blanche Trilling, head of Women's Physical Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison), who had hired H'Doubler to teach women's sports after her graduation in 1910, insisted a few years later that she create a new course—a dance class (Moore 1975, 14). H'Doubler's introduction of the skeleton in the dance classroom was a strategy that invited a rejection of tradition in the method and content of dance training—that of observing a cisgendered instructor demonstrating—in favor of a modernizing agenda of abstraction and experimentation at self-definition through movement. H'Doubler displaced the implicit pedagogic and aesthetic hierarchies of the professional dance studio by making the *de facto* demonstrative body that of a non-gendered skeleton. From these known facts of her use of the skeleton in the studio, it is possible to speculate how H'Doubler implicitly de-spectacularized the role of dance demonstrator. Effectively, as a white woman she used the skeleton as an ungendered mirror, a neutral double of herself. This allowed the community of female students in her classroom to bring different readings to the skeleton as seemingly unmarked, a tool on which to observe movement in a queer human-object relationship unhinged from heteronormative gender roles and pressures of self-presentation. While elsewhere the skeleton continued to be used to bolster essentialist arguments in the context of medicine, ethnography, and eugenics, sequestered in a dance studio, H'Doubler repurposed it. She used the frame of women's physical education and her focus as a nascent dance thinker, an assistant who merely manipulated the skeleton's limbs through a range of basic swinging and bending motions, to present it as unmarked, a mere tool for demonstrating and observing movement. These approaches would feed into dance modernism by focusing on the structural qualities and functional mechanics of the human body as a dance medium while providing a queer and ostensibly un-raced counterbalance to heteronormativity and gendered self-display.

In some respects, H'Doubler's bringing a skeleton into the teaching of dance aligns it more closely with the anatomical body that was formulated in nineteenth-century museum display than that of



Photo 1. Margaret H'Doubler lecturing with a skeleton, n.d. Photographer: unknown. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives.

popular and art dance of the era. Her method coaxed students to invent a new dance language of abstraction by experimenting with movement that came from their bones as they emulated the joint articulations of the skeleton. The idiosyncratic dance language they developed through this method was based on literally externalizing their structural interiority—a marker of aesthetic modernism. By working in the overlap between science and art, both of which used display to pose questions about how bodies produce ways of seeing and generating implied or explicit significance, H'Doubler framed the dancer as a body that becomes present as a stand-in, through absenting her own body—a paradox Croft has noted in other contexts as a queer possibility of embodiment (2017, 120). In the nineteenth century, museums were a prime site where people were accustomed to encountering instructive displays of human anatomy through the use of skeletons, preserved body parts, wax facsimiles, and other representations of bodily interiors. In both arenas, bodies were the object of enhanced self-awareness in the belief this would lead to the valued social attributes of self-discipline, control, and the cultivation of responsible citizens. As Elizabeth Stephens notes in regard to how museum exhibitions often spectacularized the body, “The body became one very privileged site in which to exert the control and maintain the order which was so important to nineteenth-century culture.” As a facet of this “one’s own body came to be understood as a social obligation and a path to personal fulfillment” (Stephens 2011, 22). The self-scrutiny these exhibitions invited fed into ideals “crucial to the development of the responsible and respectable bourgeois self,” including self-discipline and constant self-scrutiny.

H'Doubler's use of the skeleton is congruent with some of these same goals, but rather than absorbing these lessons through passive visual observation of spectacles of human anatomy, she taught students to see and experience the body as a vehicle for deliberate motion. The skeleton provided her with a figure through which questions about meanings of bodies could be posed. It is an interior that makes visible truths about those bodies. However, beyond these structural and

metaphysical frames, H'Doubler curiously omits any references to the skeleton's other five essential functions (admittedly, all of these others are focused on the living body): providing protection for the brain and vital organs; giving shape to the body; holding the body upright; holding vital organs in place; and producing red and white blood cells in its marrow. It is the postmortem skeleton as a structure exclusively that concerns her rather than the physiological, clinical body.

In an oral history she gave in 1971, reflecting on her decision to bring a skeleton into the dance class, H'Doubler defended it as part of a strategy that also included her use of blindfolds to anchor women's awareness in their individual bodies from a kinesthetic sense:

I had the mark on the floor and had them get aesthetically aware and had a blindfold so they couldn't see or imitate and had to feel, to realize there was an awareness in all of this and connect—to experience these sensations before we commenced to intellectualize about them, to form ideas. I mean, you have to have experience before there can be knowledgeable information, you see?... They never saw me to imitate, and *I never taught a class without a skeleton*. Why? To show the structure. The structure response is first. (H'Doubler 1971, 12; emphasis added)

By redirecting students' focus from the ocular to the kinesthetic in this way, H'Doubler muted display as a prime goal of dance training. By its own anomalous presence in the dance studio, the skeleton was alien while functioning as a gateway *to* the alien. It did this by estranging students from the customary visual experience of their bodies, as they observed its jangling limbs, inspiring an intimate kinesthetic consciousness and discovery of a new repertoire of functional movement. A regard of the skeleton's undulating extremities as an impetus for dancing introduced it as a presence that was simultaneously a presence and an absence because it came from a cadaver. At the same time, it was a figurative body that could only be acted upon by H'Doubler swinging, bending, and folding its limbs, ghosting its liveness as a forced encounter with subjectivity and the logic of the female student's anatomy, agency, and mortality.<sup>5</sup> As I will show in the following section, it also sanctioned a way to think about gender and queerness without assuming an oppositional relationship to heterosexuality and gender norms. H'Doubler's skeleton thus passively invited disidentification with the dominant heteronormative gendering of bodies in the academy while leaving links to their whiteness unchallenged. This article argues that H'Doubler's deployment of the skeleton toggled among this range of associations, boundaries, and limitations, impacting what would evolve into dance modernism and the possibility of a more complex queer intervention in performance.<sup>6</sup>

## Skeletons, History, and Dance Modernism

This process of the skeleton becoming a talisman for the modern dancing body as a marionette-like assemblage of human bones wired together, has origins in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America when associations about anatomy, health, mortality, and social identities of bodies were deeply intertwined (Veder 2015, 2). As historian Robin Veder has argued in regard to visual arts in the nineteenth century, "the idiom of anatomy" was established as a site where boundaries between social identities and individuals' conception of their bodies were increasingly constructed, maintained, and contested (2015, 2). Compounding this was the fact that, historically, times of change are when the body becomes an especially fraught symbol—both its corporeal presence and material remains. The gathering and displaying of bones in museum exhibitions offered a symbolic show of how humanity might be classified, and science used to argue theories of racial hierarchies and genetic elites. This collecting of human remains for display, teaching, and (politicized) interpretation was particularly intense during the final decades of the nineteenth century and the start of the twentieth century, paralleling the years of H'Doubler's intellectual development. Born in 1889, she was a New Woman, the first generation of educated, economically independent,

single white women from the middle class who challenged gender relations and attempted to fashion their own independent sexuality (Ross 2000, 105, 112; Smith-Rosenberg 1990, 264).

Thus, far from an unmarked assistant, H'Doubler's skeleton can be argued to have functioned as a Trojan Horse importing queer and modernist aesthetics into dance training. Seemingly innocuous, H'Doubler's skeleton introduced an implicitly lesbian challenge to straight white female respectability by enacting new possibilities for how women could appear in public and how gender might be read differently based on changing contexts. In H'Doubler's classroom, the skeleton redefined its historic associations with primitivism, an aesthetic deeply entwined with modernism. However, H'Doubler stripped it of the fetishistic nostalgia that other early dance modernists like Martha Graham drew out of the commingling of modernism and primitivism. Using a mix of progressive gender and aesthetic ideals, yet shadowed by regressive racist ideologies, H'Doubler's skeleton shaped the idiom of anatomy to lead students into self-referential movement explorations.

Ellen Moore, a trained dancer who studied under H'Doubler as a graduate student from 1949 to 1951, the final years H'Doubler led the dance program at UW-Madison, is the only student to have published in detail how H'Doubler worked in the classroom with the skeleton. Moore's recollection reveals how initially bizarre H'Doubler's skeleton-centered approach to dance training appeared to experienced dancers:

I was at first shocked and annoyed to have to stop, think, explore, and dance without a model to watch. I did not want to give up the exciting speed (and anxiety) of a follow-the-demonstrator class. But the pleasure and relief of being able to put my concentration into my own rendering of a dance movement rather than an exact copy of someone else's movement gradually pulled me into the intricacies of Margaret H'Doubler's environment for learning. (Moore 1975, 13)

Moore recalls that H'Doubler's "kinesthetic sense soon became as important to me as my eyesight," and that by eliminating visual data, one attended more closely to kinesthetic information about movement. "We learned to analyze and describe motor response and to practice evaluating objectively the details of our own performance." Eliding the heteronormative gaze, H'Doubler's skeleton made visible a queer female body positioned against the norm, implicitly challenging the politics of patriarchy and presenting the dance classroom as a site of possibility. H'Doubler extrapolates this into larger lessons about independence and embodied social power, continuing, "We gained confidence in our judgments and came to relish the complex kinesthetic symphonies from our muscles, tendons, and joints when they were being moved sensitively" (Moore 1975, 15).

A skeleton was an ideal object on which to model an abstractly expressive modernist body because as H'Doubler manipulated its limbs to demonstrate joint action, it automatically dropped back into stillness with the untiring, uninflected functionalism emblematic of a mechanical performer. Sleek and streamlined it looked backward and forward, simultaneously gesturing toward Taylorist efficiency and regulation as the body's natural state of being. At the same time, H'Doubler also primed her students to perceive the heightened corporeal awareness Moore describes (Ross 2000; Preston 2009). For H'Doubler, the skeleton was a proxy for the unmarked body; it was not only more neutral than demonstrating movement herself, but it also supported her classroom as building rational and self-regulating women with authority over their physical selves. In using a skeleton as part of her daily work, H'Doubler implicitly asserted to her colleagues, both within and beyond the Women's Physical Education Department, her own standing as a legitimate researcher, part of a culture of scientific knowledge about the body. She turned the skeleton into a talisman for women pursuing dance in academia, giving them fluency in bodily processes and, at the same time, a private embodied awareness of their rational as well as sexual selves. Intuitively, H'Doubler understood that dance required a sense of inwardness, and the skeleton both validated and sanctioned this, doing so within the agency of medical science.

H'Doubler's tactical deployment of a skeleton positioned her as part of a long history of reformers who focused on the material human body, especially the female body, to address sexual politics around reproduction, disease, fertility, and public agency. The first explicitly labeled illustration of a female skeleton was published in 1733, followed in 1759 by the work of the female French anatomist Jean-Genevieve-Charlotte Thiroux d'Arconville, who circulated some of the first drawings of a female skeleton (Reilly 2014, 113). However, even two-dimensional images of a skeleton were melded by gender politics. In these historic depictions of skeletons, as historian Londa Schiebinger has argued, proportions of human bones were deliberately exaggerated to falsely gender them and support claims about women being biologically destined for childbearing rather than intellectual labor. By exaggerating in drawings the width of the female pelvis and reducing the size of their skull relative to depictions of male skeletons, female skeletons were effectively reduced to their reproductive function as the female body collapsed into the social body, policed for limited cognitive ability, and producing babies (Reilly 2014, 113–114).

H'Doubler implicitly pushed back against this use of anatomy to delimit women through what, in another context, Schiebinger dubbed “a cult of motherhood” that had begun in the eighteenth century and continued forward. In the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, anatomy-based arguments like these often masked racist anxieties about newly arrived immigrants from Eastern Europe and Asia, as well as fellow citizens of color, all of whom were seen as potentially threatening the white majority with higher birthrates, particularly as white women became more focused on emancipation than childbearing (Schiebinger 1986, 53). Instead of a symbol of this prevalent biological determinism in which the essences of women were the utilitarian duties of pregnancy and motherhood, H'Doubler used the skeleton to forcefully display to communities of women the ways that gender could be read differently on the dancing body, implicitly Western Euro-American and white, depending on pedagogic objectives and contexts.

The politics of dress reform was another legacy influencing H'Doubler. In the decades leading up to her use of the skeleton, dramatic drawings of skeletons had been used in support of reforms targeted at improving women's physical and structural health. Since the mid-nineteenth century, visual images of skeletons, particularly skeletons whose rib cages had been grotesquely deformed through the wearing of corsets, had been used by advocates of the rational dress movement to bring awareness to the physical torture of women's fashion. This movement was a facet of the push to liberate women's bodies in tandem with their agency in the public sphere by advocating for more practical, healthy, and comfortable clothing for daily and leisure wear and exercise. H'Doubler folded these ambitions of dress reform into her pedagogy as well. Her influential 1925 manual for teaching dance, *The Dance and Its Place in Education*, which curiously omits any mention of the skeleton, includes pages of sewing instructions for six different patterns of simple sheer Grecian tunics, attire free from bindings, corsets, and armored undergarments. Students were directed how to make these Hellenic uniforms for themselves, attire that reflected liberated couture free of the impossibly tiny waists and heavy skirts of contemporary fashion that encumbered and sexualized women. H'Doubler's designs instead invited muscles and bones to move with basic anatomical ease.

Even bringing a female student into proximity with a human skeleton was itself a radical act in the early twentieth century. The power and gender dynamics circulating in anatomy rooms had historically made women's firsthand experience with anatomy via the interiors of dead bodies challenging and problematic. These spaces were maintained as privileged sites where young men in training to be physicians were admitted to the fraternity of medical knowledge through the masculinizing ritual of human dissection. Dissection was dangerous and difficult and overwritten with metaphors of mastery as dissectors crossed the boundary between life and death to cut, penetrate, survey, and appropriate the interior of the body (Veder 2015, 2). Women were thus effectively precluded from dissection and medical training until the mid-nineteenth century (2015, 88–89). Implicit in these gender tensions was the paradox that gaining firsthand knowledge about anatomy was morally

transgressive and outside the social order, yet it was also essential to functioning as a medical professional. The residue of this exclusion, along with social anxieties about women being tainted if they worked with dead bodies, had a long legacy and thus made H'Doubler's choice to bring a human skeleton into her dance classroom in the early twentieth century still a morally fraught undertaking. However, by importing a skeleton into a dance studio rather than an anatomy lab, H'Doubler forcefully removed it from an exclusively medical context. Instead, she inserted it into a health and art frame, asserting in parallel that knowledge gleaned from manipulating a human skeleton was essential to functioning as a dance educator, as well as for a woman's stewardship of her own body. Positioning her skeleton hanging vertically and displaying its bones as jiggling, swinging, appendages separated it as gesturing toward the living rather than the recumbent immobility of seductively displayed artificial human remains like the famed Anatomical Venuses, the female wax models from La Specola's workshop in late eighteenth-century Florence.<sup>7</sup> The discourses around anatomical displays of the body and skeletons changed significantly across these centuries, yet the deep passivity of the Venuses' poses and the dangling restlessness of H'Doubler's skeleton are inescapable. A 1950s catalogue from the Clay-Adams company, the only one in H'Doubler's archives, displays two different frames for holding skeletons—one that anchors the skeleton firmly to a rod and the other with a hook above the skull that allows it to swing freely—the model H'Doubler chose. (Photo 2) In contrast, H'Doubler's students were taught to read formalist aesthetics in skeleton models by perceiving kinesthetically through their own bodies, and experiencing the “energy exchange” seen as underlying the aesthetics of modernism (Veder 2015, 30). Exploring these cultural, psychoanalytic, scientific, and art historical currents adds important context to an evolving understanding of the significance of H'Doubler's skeleton.

## The Skeleton and the Queer Dancing Body

A profeminist whose advocacy for women's physical agency threatened the legitimacy and naturalness of a male dominated bourgeoisie order, H'Doubler shaped a rationale for bringing the skeleton into the dance classroom that also needs to be considered through a lens of queer antinormativity. By ceding the role of the demonstrative body to a full-scale skeleton, she actively disidentified herself from the category of a dancing woman while allowing different readings of the skeleton's gender that depended upon one's own positionality. Images of her teaching a master class at Mills College in the 1960s while standing beside a skeleton seem to tip the equation between actor and observer as she raises one arm overhead while the skeleton gazes out across the gesturing students as if monitoring the entire room's efforts to emulate the skeleton's actions (Photo 3). H'Doubler contested this expectation of being an image by looking below the flesh and manipulating the limbs of a skeleton prop rather than her own to demonstrate, as had been customary in dance instruction for centuries. In rejecting the role of the dance teacher as spectacle, she made observation of the blunt functionalism of the skeleton's bones a means to direct the students' attention inward to their own somatic experience. By disrupting visuality, she redirected their awareness of their embodiment as a social tool via this imaginary of their own skeletons.

This formalist use of the skeleton in the evolution of dance modernism is significant. It possessed what is, in cultural theorist Jane Bennett's definition, “thing power,” the “curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle” (2010, 2). Among these effects were nationalist anxieties about racial purity, women's reproductive fitness, and their physical agency. By functioning as a delegate for the dancing body, H'Doubler's skeleton disrupted how dance had been used to inculcate mainstream behaviors and values. It problematized them, turning a figure of ambiguous social meanings and troubling histories of the socially marginalized, the uncanny, the medical, and the ethnographic into one of indeterminate sex and uncoded race.

Positioning the skeleton as an unsexed demonstrator, H'Doubler made its indeterminate status an invitation to imagine alternative ways of being for bodies in motion. Imparting to women's bodies a





*Photo 2. Margaret H'Doubler lecturing with skeleton, Mills College, Oakland, April 12, 1973. Photographer: James E. Graham. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives.*

medicalized and scientific context as a means to validate them, H'Doubler's skeleton reflexively positioned her as a stealth feminist health reformer standing outside socially acceptable roles. Renouncing the nineteenth-century traditional approach she inherited, that of regarding gender as a fixed binary and the heterosexual ordering of society as a necessary structure, H'Doubler instigated curricular innovations by choosing an icon that opened the door to the possibility of the pleasure of movement independent of gender as a social construct. Manipulating a skeleton's bobbing limbs as a woman, she gestured toward a denaturalized heterosexuality, changing up the relationship between normative and transgressive. Transforming realia of the body, which only a few years earlier had been viewed by the public as a macabre memento mori, into a paradigm for connecting visibility and sensation, H'Doubler framed the body as a personal physical resource to be discovered by the female dancer in a homosocial climate focusing on the sensory pleasures of the freely moving body. "Students need knowledge of the structural determinants of movement to be able to use their bodies as a master instrument instead of yielding to the impulse to move without direction and control," she asserted. "Such a study leads us to the skeleton" (H'Doubler, *n.d.a.*, 4–5). With this statement, H'Doubler implicitly shunned the spontaneous and spirit-driven style of feminized interpretive dance of the time. She interrupted how gender norms were produced and assumed



Photo 3. Margaret H'Doubler in a master class at Mills College, Oakland, CA April 12, 1973, photographer, James E Graham. (Courtesy James E. Graham & University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives)

through performance while simultaneously pointing toward a self-ordered and regulated body, one understood as a system of “objective mechanical factors” with “bone levers.” “The skeletal structure exists as a tool,” she explained in an introductory lecture, *Miracle of Motion*, “a machine” that one “owns” and “runs” (H'Doubler, n.d.b., 4–5).

Through the skeleton, the deep structural interior of the body was effectively rendered unsexed. A photograph from 1965 depicts an animatedly grinning H'Doubler at a dance conference with four former women students clustered around a skeleton in animated conversation as two stretch one of the skeleton's legs, confidently manipulating its limbs as if touching the bones were essential to the conversation. (Photo 4) H'Doubler decentered the dynamics of optics in dance training and performing, often covering the mirrors in her dance studio and requiring her students to wear blindfolds as they moved, thus substituting a personal kinesthetic awakening for visual pleasures. Using the skeleton as a demonstrator, occasionally supplemented by anatomical charts of the muscles, as well as a student assistant, H'Doubler optimized homosocial community, problematizing rather than asserting a solo star approach to dance training and performance. In *The Dance and its Place in Education*, she emphasizes the importance of avoiding artificial movements learned through



*Photo 4. Margaret H'Doubler Demonstrating with a skeleton at a Dance Conference, Boulder, Colorado. June 1965. Pictured with H'Doubler are Shirley Dodge, Shirley Guether and Betty Hayes. Photographer unknown. (Courtesy University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives)*

imitation. Instead, she argues that to create the “natural body,” one with “a sense of rhythm and feeling for movement” and an understanding of “the laws of balance and movement,” a dance teacher needs to “know her physics, anatomy and kinesiology” (H'Doubler 1925, 59). Effacing her own body, and her own authority as not just demonstrator but also teacher, H'Doubler was known to pause in the midst of class and turn to the students, asking, “Now class, what is the next step?” after they had collectively built a pattern of movement based on their examinations of the actions of the skeleton’s joints such as rotating the thigh in the hip joint, flexing and extending the joints in the spine, and flexing the hip joint. She sought a new movement idiom, one freer from the gender politics of classical ballet and interpretive dance and more in the spirit of early twentieth-century academic sports for women, which were adapted to remove masculinizing elements of competition. She emphasized the physical pleasures of the body, directing students to maintain a pace in class where their intellects, feelings, and motor responses could progress together so that they could enjoy as much as possible what she called an “integrated response” (Moore 1975, 14).

In embracing science and the skeleton as a heuristic, H'Doubler facilitated a radical reconceptualization of dance and the dancer. Her classroom offered a frame in which bodies were seen through the lens of anatomy and where functional actions of the joints and limbs dictated the dynamic and range of each student’s movements. By doing so she revealed how bodies and gendered identities are constructed through the sedimentation of educational structures by offering an alternative paradigm. Anatomy could be the instructor. Instead of being marginal, anatomical knowledge became a legitimizing force for H'Doubler’s dance students, initially only women. The skeleton was used to affirm the centrality of the practical body to the new academic discipline of dance. At the same time, this offered a new alignment of dance with a growing emphasis on the fit body in evolving modern social institutions. H'Doubler’s introduction of the dancing body as gender nonconforming and undisciplined in the context of traditional binaries allowed a glimpse of how social power is

imposed on the body, a struggle Michel Foucault identified as a means for dominant institutions to construct and validate particular forms of modern sexuality (1977, 26). By displacing social power onto a nonliving form, but one locked into verticality because of its suspension from a hook, she was offering an alternative modern sexuality. This fragmenting and isolating of the body from its fleshy, living context in favor of a scientific understanding of the biomechanics of the body brought into dance what Robert Romanyshyn in another context has labeled an “anatomical gaze,” “the dispassionate, fixed gaze which takes the world apart in order to put it back together again” (Romanyshyn 1989, 115). By the mid-twentieth century, the legacy of this early coproduction of queerness and modernism in H'Doubler's skeleton pedagogy would feed into shifting views of normative notions of gender, sexuality, and race. In looking more broadly at traditionally excluded cultural practices as sites for formative examples of queer performance in the history of modernism, H'Doubler's classroom needs to be revisited for its potential as an “imaginative and critical space for alternative modes of being” and as a “cultural space for queer spectatorship” (Farfan 2017, 3).

That the use of a human skeleton in early twentieth-century dance set so much in motion reflects its force as both a symbol and a potent material object. This positioning of the skeleton was resonant with emerging ideas in the early twentieth century about what the prolific English utopian socialist Edward Carpenter dubbed “The Intermediate Sex.” This was Carpenter's term to describe what he maintained as men and women who crossed the “temperaments, sensibilities and sexual preferences” normally assigned to “the two sexes” (Carpenter 1908, 9). Affording the skeleton, the status of a thing allowed H'Doubler to use it to foreground a dissident female sexuality, disrupting conventional expectations of heteronormative dancing identities. Her demonstrations of movements of the skeleton's torso and limbs inspired motor impulses in her students and shifted these human remains from a macabre artifact into a gateway to experiential learning. Next, she regulated students' movement experimentations, refining them by applying “conventions of line, balance and decorum,” transforming them, as she phrased it, with Victorian primness, from “natural discharge” into “the dance proper” and “art” (H'Doubler 1925, 15). Occupying the status of a thing with powers, H'Doubler's skeleton had a catalyzing impact at the birth of the academic discipline of dance because it so effectively displaced the customary live human demonstrator in dance instruction, replacing it with an isolated form outside the binary, yet one with a latent erotics (Turkle 2007, 307). Affording the skeleton the status of an instructive tool for liveness also facilitates a recognition of it as nonbinary, and as a no longer human “thing,” operating outside disciplinary norms and repetitions that have historically been used to sex and normalize the body. In attending to the most durable matter of the body, the bones, H'Doubler invited a materialist view of the material of the body and the active role of nonhuman materials (2010, 1–2). In her paradigm of “thinghood,” Bennett argues for an enhanced receptivity to the impersonal life surrounding us and an expanded awareness of the web of connections between bodies, our nonhuman dimensions, and objects. This leads to the discovery of the expressive capacity of materials and objects, such as the skeleton (2010, 5).

## Eugenic Ideals and the Skeleton

One of the most troubling, if unintended, intersections H'Doubler's skeleton brought into dance as an academic discipline was its legacy as a tool for asserting eugenic ideals. Eugenicists' theories about race and gender developed across multiple disciplines in the final decades of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century, persisting with particular tenacity in academia (Redman 2016, 6, 13). Rethinking the symbolism of the skeleton in the emergence of dance as a queer modernist art practice then necessitates coming to terms with its fraught symbolic status as human remains used to support the racial taxonomies of eugenics and their attendant politics. Animated by Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection, and his cousin and biologist Francis Galton's late nineteenth-century studies of heredity, eugenicists argued for the use of science to solve social problems (crime, unemployment, alcoholism, prostitution) and class conflict by

treating what they saw as the cause—bad heredity. Those deemed the racial, physical, and cognitive elite were encouraged to improve the human race by “better breeding” through marriage and reproduction while the financially, mentally, and physically disadvantaged were subject to eugenic regulation, policed sexuality, and involuntary sterilization laws. The skeleton, having been dismissed as a fetish in the previous century, was rehabilitated as a representation of the scientific in the search for race-based social hierarchies and eugenic purity agendas. The Galtonian science of eugenics intersected fitness and exercise cultures, aligning techniques and training methods to improve the human body with anatomical study, testing, and the measurement of young adults in an effort to assist nature.

An international movement with a strong following in the United States, eugenic management of reproduction was particularly aggressive in Wisconsin, which passed a eugenic law in 1913, empowering the state to sterilize “criminals, insane, feeble-minded and epileptics as well as those deemed to be sexually promiscuous” (Gordon 2016). The Health-Marriage and Sterilization Acts regulated behavior and physical health, requiring physical and moral certification of fitness for a marriage license.<sup>8</sup> Eugenic legislation found easy support in Wisconsin because its land grant university system, with established programs in biology, psychology, medicine, and sociology, had sympathetic faculty and a reputation for using science to inform public policy—and eugenics was considered an accepted science (Dowbiggin 1997, 126). The Madison campus of the university was also home to one of the most progressive early women’s physical education programs in the United States, directed by Blanche Trilling. An instructor in higher education, and particularly women’s physical education departments, was among the few professions in which ambitious, educated, and often single New Women, like H’Doubler and Trilling, could enjoy a sororal community and independent lifestyle as professional women who were childless. (Photo 5)

However, their progressive gender politics were offset by troubling intersections with the rhetoric of racist eugenic ideology, which they embraced as a means of leveraging dance into greater legitimacy in the academy. In their quest to legitimize dance as a socially useful academic discipline for college women, Trilling and H’Doubler treaded into deeply problematic territory when they found a strong rationale that echoed rhetoric of eugenic arguments. They also found an enthusiastic advocate in the UW Dean of Women, F. Louise Nardin. Nardin contributed a foreword to H’Doubler’s 1925 book in which Nardin extolls de facto eugenicist virtues of race betterment and feminization through dance for college women. Denigrating professional dance as requiring too much skill, and racializing social dance as “a graceless lurching or tottering or lunging about to the accompaniment of strident, unmelodious sounds, beating a barbaric reiteration of a crass or meaningless phrase,” Nardin lauded H’Doubler’s presentation of dance as a communal and non-masculinizing activity: “There was no competition, no grasping self-assertion, no disappointment... There were no points no score, no winning, no losing” (H’Doubler 1925, xii–xiv).

Between 1917 and 1924, paralleling the key years H’Doubler worked to establish dance as an academic discipline, the body was increasingly the locus of nativist interventions aimed at preserving and improving the dominant groups in the population.<sup>9</sup> As scholar Nancy Ordover has observed of eugenics proponents, “The legislation they drafted, the interventions they backed, the medical regimens they prescribed, stemmed from a belief that everything from intellect to sexuality to poverty to crime was attributable to heredity” (Ordover 2003, xv). Several prominent social activists heading race and gender movements also championed the eugenic agenda, including Margaret Sanger, leader of the American birth control movement, who advocated birth control, or if that was not possible, sterilization for women believed likely to pass on mental or physical limitations. W.E.B. Du Bois, in advocating for racial justice and improvement for African Americans in his 1903 essay “The Talented Tenth,” also argued that the top 10 percent of African American intellectuals should be educated into the intellectual and reproductive elite to “develop(ing) the Best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst” (Du Bois 1903, 75). Du Bois was joined by African American physicians, biologists, and social scientists who used



Photo 5. H'Doubler (1965) University of Wisconsin-Madison. Photographer: Barbara Baenzinger. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives.

parallel eugenic arguments supporting their advocacy for racial justice and improvement for African Americans.

Eugenic arguments were also actively used to sanction women's physical education programs in universities across the United States as key sites for regulating and filtering healthy and unhealthy women through posture analysis and rehabilitative physical activities targeted at improving their bodies for childbearing. The University of Wisconsin was an early leader in this, instituting in the 1920s "posture tracings," "shadowgraphs," and eventually nude photographs of women students as a means of gathering data for race betterment. Freshmen women's posture was analyzed via these images and measurements taken in the belief that an erect posture could serve as a racial, social, and fitness marker, an index of the degree of civilization and health of an ethnic and racial group. Correcting posture was considered a means of imposing corporeal discipline to hedge against future social, mental, and hereditary problems. Sports historian Patricia Vertinsky has noted obvious gender disparities in these posture assessments. "Girls and women were seen as in particular need of posture remediation," she writes, commenting that men were much less often seen as needing this, "although excellent posture in men was also deemed rare" (2002, 116). Until well into the second half of the twentieth century, posture photos continued to be collected at American universities, at times with skeletons posed next to them. Initially these were part of covert anthropological research E. A. Hooton of Harvard and W. H. Sheldon of Yale were conducting, collecting data to use in eugenic arguments seeking to correlate a person's body measurements and proportions with intelligence, temperament, morality, and future achievement.

The skeleton's presence in the dance class supported a parallel focus on refining physical agility and grace as an index of evolutionary progress, moral strength, and spiritual elevation. Shadowing all of these uses of the skeleton was the selective breeding of human populations, a blend of Galtonian eugenics and Mendelian genetics, to improve the gene pool by restricting it to white, Western races (Brauer 2012). H'Doubler's prose in her 1925 dance text tips toward a eugenicist agenda in

its lauding of “the art instinct for its power to preserve the race from falling back into chaos” and to “lead men out of the jungle and kept them resolutely on the upward path” (1925, 227). Her reference to “jungle” here is fraught with racist symbolism and positioned in contrast to Euro-American movement that is uplifted, symmetrical, and rhythmically harmonious in opposition to the weighted, polycentric, and polyrhythmic music and dance of an Africanist aesthetic.<sup>10</sup> H’Doubler cautions that “in all early life (whether it be that of the primitive man or the young child) the natural discharge is over the motor nerve paths to the muscles . . . these movements that are merely a reflect accompaniment of feeling cannot yet be called the dance” (1925, 15). In her formulation, “primitiveness” and “animality” must be subdued through regulating rhythm and time sequencing. She emphasizes systemizing motion to disrupt normative gender desire and sexual identities that are a currency of traditional Western dance training. Her argument echoes the race betterment rhetoric of eugenics, reinforced by her inclusion of two foundational eugenics texts on her list of recommended readings for her students: Charles Darwin’s *The Descent of Man* and his book on evolution theory, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1925, 255).

Eugenics, like early twentieth-century academic dance, shared an emphasis on social improvement through a disciplined body, signified by good posture, socially coded decorous movements executed to Western classical music, and uplifted and symmetrical musculoskeletal alignment. The skeleton thus became an icon of the scientific body, bridging medicine, anatomy, anthropology, and eugenic systems for testing and measuring bodies. Ideas about evolutionism, racism, nationalism, and cultural hierarchy attached to it functioned as tacit citations in the dance studio. Believing that acquired characteristics could be inherited, eugenicists found universities to be ideal sites where scientific management, measurement, testing, and rational planning could be instituted in time to reshape students’ minds and bodies prior to normative marriage and parenting. Indeed, between 1914 and 1928, as H’Doubler was refining her approach to dance through the skeleton, the number of courses with eugenic content in American colleges boomed from 44 to 376. Artifacts that were used to support eugenic arguments for idealized bodies also populate H’Doubler’s dance pedagogy. She displayed plaster copies of *Venus de Milo* and *Winged Victory of Samothrace* on stands at the perimeter of the dance studio as proxies for the bodies under construction in her class. She paired these with the skeleton to heighten proprioceptive awareness and transform students’ understanding of their muscles, joints, and bodies as part of a new visual technology (Long 2019, 123). These statues modeled the idea of “uplift,” the elongated spine and inflated chest privileged in her classroom along with Hellenic iconography.<sup>11</sup> Together they coded a racialized corporeality of whiteness (Veder 2015, 78). Syntactically, Black expressive culture and African-derived practices and traditions were excluded from the aesthetic being shaped. H’Doubler’s pedagogy itself thus fed into a current of queer dance modernism that was implicitly white.

Off campus, racial biases against non-majoritarian students were more blatant. Three of H’Doubler’s most famous students, who would go on to major professional careers within a few years of graduating—the Jewish choreographer Anna Halprin (’42) and African American principal dancers with the Martha Graham Company, Mary Hinkson (’46, MS ’47) and Matt Turney (’47)—all encountered housing discrimination through an openly acknowledged racist policy that banned Jewish and African American students from dormitories and most private rooming houses in Madison.<sup>12</sup> These embedded racist values contrasted with H’Doubler’s queer subversion and unwitting appropriation of eugenic systems of regulating women’s bodies and of tethering women to marriage and motherhood, and they complicate the politics of her dance training. The off campus explicit racism contrasted with the on-campus obliviousness of the racism and eugenics that marked the skeleton and belied it as a not so neutral tool. That H’Doubler’s use of the skeleton unfolded in the midst of such a complicated web of issues suggests how it was fraught with its own overdetermination and was ultimately irresolvable with a fixed identity. The students who endured racist housing restrictions reflected decades later on the contrasting upbeat climate of (white) positivity H’Doubler exuded in her classroom, effectively masking racial oppression with what Sara Ahmed labeled in another context as “happiness as a form of worldmaking” (2010,

13). “Miss H’Doubler was the most encouraging person, I think, in the entire world,” Hinkson said. “She tried to erase all doubts each and every one of us had about ourselves.” Hinkson’s comments suggest how her personal consciousness of unhappiness and estrangement met the politics of happiness in H’Doubler’s classroom. “She just had a way of erasing every worry and every care in the world . . . [she] could find a positive way for one to look at any dark cloud,” Hinkson continued (Ross 2000, 190). Halprin agreed, recalling H’Doubler’s enthusiastic support of her graduation thesis on Jewish dance, she said, simply, “Her class provided a space for being accepted” (2000, 196).

H’Doubler, like other early twentieth-century movement educators and artists, was searching for authentic somatic experience, what many referred to as “the natural body,” and much of this centered on looking inward to a depth reaching the taboo. Immediately prior to launching her class at UW-Madison, H’Doubler had been a visiting graduate student at Columbia University’s Teachers College, which was a center of Progressive Era posture reform and the center of behaviorist studies of fine-motor education. There she was exposed to Columbia’s training in physical education, which used scientific modes with an emphasis on “introspective kinesthetic awareness as a tool for self-care” in a quest to uncover natural movement (Veder 2015, 187). This kinesthetic awareness was inculcated as a tool for self-care through a range of two-dimensional visual images that included schematics of sequential exercises students were to imitate and “X-ray views and annotated reproductions of paintings that extended the range of vision into the normally concealed body interior” as a means of introspection (2015, 220). The philosophy underlying all of this was that of John Dewey, a professor at Columbia during H’Doubler’s time there and a major advocate for the importance of direct physical experience. Dewey championed kinesthetic awareness of the skeletal and joint function inside one’s body as a means of achieving healthy posture. Two-dimensional visual representations of the interior of the body—X-ray views and charts and drawings—were sold as aids for physical education teachers and artists who used schematics of bodies moving sequentially to envision how one could use the mechanics of the body to move naturally. Art history and physical education thus partnered in conditioning the public to view what Veder calls in another context, “the skeleton of form” in modern art (2015, 139). Working in dance, H’Doubler made the anatomical body three-dimensional, via the skeleton, rewriting from the inside out what women believed about their bodies. Anatomy could be an idiom for contesting class and gender limitations, not just constructing them.

Dance has been slow to recognize the importance of science, and particularly physiology and anatomy, in its own evolutionary narrative, especially from the nineteenth century to the present. Although a few major early twentieth-century American dancers did build their aesthetic on a reclaiming and rediscovery of the romanticized natural, healthy body, this was most often manifested in nostalgic calls for a return to the idyllic body of untamed nature and idealized antiquity, not the body of science and medicine. Foremost among these was Isadora Duncan, who referenced a skeleton when she famously derided ballet as *untraining*, leading to bodily “deformity.”

But look—under the skirts, under the tricots are dancing deformed muscles. Look still farther—underneath the muscles are deformed bones. *A deformed skeleton is dancing before you.* This deformation through incorrect dress and incorrect movement is the result of the training necessary to the ballet. The ballet condemns itself by enforcing the deformation of the beautiful woman’s body! (Duncan 1928, 172; emphasis added)

Duncan references the skeleton and muscles in a deliberately anti-scientific manner, as if one could look through clothing, flesh, and musculature directly to the bones. Duncan and H’Doubler both challenged gender hierarchies, yet at the same time they reinforced essentialized racial distinctions, concerned about separating their artistry from nonwhite subjects’ dance (Kraut 2011, 7). Duncan also aligns with H’Doubler in her conceptual understanding of a cause-and-effect relationship between proper dance training and the constitution of a healthy, fit



body. Duncan's language here echoes familiar fin de siècle dress reform critiques of the body-deforming dangers of fashion that H'Doubler's skeleton also implicitly opposes. Duncan and H'Doubler also reconfigure the female dancer as an expressive and powerful white subject rather than a passive erotic object (2011, 7). However, H'Doubler curbs her rhetoric away from sensationalizing the pain and disfigurement of the body caused by women's high fashion clothing. This was a tactic favored by dress reform advocates who also used the skeleton—but in the service of attention-grabbing visuals and lurid descriptions of deformed bones in women's and young girl's spines, waists, and rib cages, twisted and crushed into impossibly tiny dimensions by the wearing of corsets. In her critique, Duncan recycles codes of Victorian decorum. H'Doubler in contrast, rather than sensationalizing the horrors of women's fashion conventions to bolster her reforms, used a skeleton to normalize anatomy while eliding its status as a backdrop for the extremist arguments of eugenicists who invoked it as a symbol of racial identity of whiteness to maintain racial division.

As dance innovators, H'Doubler and Duncan were both part of a larger early twentieth-century shift in anatomical knowledge from the transgressive to the prestigious, representing the triumph of the rational over the emotional. Embedded in this evolving anatomical gaze was a deliberate awareness of how using knowledge gained through peering into the bodily interior changes how people experience *living* in the body, shifting their awareness of kinesthetic habits of body movement. H'Doubler made spectatorship of the skeleton an impetus for new physical habits. She fractured the representational history of the dancing body, allowing us to see the female dancer's body in a markedly new modernist context. In steering among multiple viewing frames, H'Doubler initially avoided the anatomy room, which had served as the setting for visuality that flirted with the pornographic through its sensuous and seductive display of dissection models (Sappol 2002, 86–87). Eventually, however, after she instituted the first dance major in 1926, she would send her students to the anatomy lab across campus to study dissection with the premed students.

In H'Doubler's treatment, the skeleton was used tactically to unravel relations between body and mind, social norms, and personal freedoms. Through her pedagogy, skeletal knowledge would be instrumental in constructing a modern body marked by efficient motion, flexibility, agency, and a rejection of traditional gender roles and gender binaries. These values of her pedagogy extended deeply into her personal life as a New Woman as well.

In disidentifying from the cultural representations of gender and sexuality of the time, H'Doubler used the "vital materiality" of the skeleton in dance to trouble gender while opening new paths for abstraction (Bennett 2010, 6). The skeleton's use in this evolution of dance modernism is significant; viewed through a lens of "thing power," it carried the "curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle." By functioning as a delegate for the dancing body, H'Doubler's skeleton disrupted how dance had been used to inculcate mainstream behaviors and values, while also trailing unanticipated discriminatory connotations. It problematized these, presenting an uncanny figure of indeterminate sex, uncoded race, ambiguous social meanings, and troubling histories. Making the anatomical interiority of the body via the skeleton a productive place for queering dance modernism effectively displaced the live, gendered body as exclusively the site of meaning making in dance. At the same time, it opened the door to a valorization of the unembellished, the ordinary, the nonbinary, and the queer. (Insert [Photo 6](#) here)

Historical accounts of dance modernism customarily omit the role of education in the reformatting of the human body in the twentieth century. This omission carries with it the awareness of how modernism's entry was facilitated by a skeleton, a figure that, once out of the metaphorical closet, was double-coded as a figure of liberation and repression. While bearing the weight of racism and sexism, it nonetheless opened a queer possibility for women's bodies to respond to pleasure and make meaning through a broad category of femininity and dance. The skeleton, dismissed as fetish in the nineteenth century, by the early twentieth century reentered the aesthetic mainstream



Photo 6. Margaret H'Doubler (1965) lecturing with a skeleton. Photographer: Barbara Baenzinger. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives.

through education to become crucial in refuting race- and gender-based social hierarchies and eugenic purity agendas. A consideration of the skeleton in early twentieth-century dance training complicates the nexus of primitivism, race, gender normativity, and modernity while providing an account of how the medicalized, anatomical body would eventually become foundational for the renewed body of dance modernism.

## Notes

1. Examining race in the classroom is not easy. Dance education scholars Takiyah Nur Amin (2017), Raquel Monroe (2011), Julie Kerr-Berry (2017), and Sherri Barr and Doug Risner (2014a, 2014b), among others, while great proponents of anti-racism work, identify student resistance to examinations of privilege and race as part of the process.

2. H'Doubler's skeleton was most likely obtained from the Clay-Adams medical technology company. The New York based Clay-Adams Company was a manufacturer and importer of laboratory, surgical, and medical supplies. The company was run from 1916 to 1935 by Robert Louis Toplitz (ca. 1851–1935). There is no receipt for the purchase, but Clay-Adams catalogues from the 1950s are contained in her papers in the UW-Madison Archives. The provenance of the skeleton matters because it signals it as a scientific specimen of real human bones, detailed and accurate for medical training and work. The skeletons in the catalogue were not gendered (Ross 2020, 232).

3. Margaret H'Doubler, "Outline/Movement Knowledge" lecture notes, n.d., Box 20, Folder 2, Series 13-5-1, Accession 1982/050, Physical Education and Dance Records (1906–1990), UW-Madison Archives, Madison Wisconsin. Margaret H'Doubler, "Structural determination" lecture notes, n.d., Box 20, Folder 4, Series 13-5-1, Accession 1982/050, Physical Education and Dance Records (1906–1990), UW-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

4. Margaret H'Doubler, "The Miracle of Motion" course materials and lecture notes, n.d., Box 20, Folder 1, Series 13-5-1, Accession 1982/050, Physical Education and Dance Records (1906–1990), UW-Madison Archives, WI.

5. It offered knowledge about death and a subtle reminder of how it haunts the dance studio. The spent body exists in the form of the continual shedding and discarding of a dancer's prior self in the daily quest for a more ideal body through class. In the professional dance world the dead exist in the ghosted presences of former dancers whose roles are being performed and whose technique, interpretations, and styling undergird the next generation learning movement vocabularies and roles.

6. The evidence for this is drawn from different historical layers, including photographic images from the 1960s, 1950s medical catalogues, and interviews in the 1990s with H'Doubler's former students. (Moore, Ellen A. 1996; Halprin, Anna, 1999; Clay–Adams catalogues 1950s).

7. Created in the 1780s in the workshop of master wax artists Clemente Susini and Felice Fontana, the Anatomical Venuses were positioned between educational and artistic, and were intended for public instruction in anatomy, replacing human dissection. (Stephens, Elizabeth, 2011, 35–37).

8. If women departed from strict norms of gender roles and sexual behavior, such as being seen in a saloon with a man or having children outside of marriage, they were at risk of being deemed defective and targeted for sterilization. (Gordon, Scott, 2016, PBS broadcast).

9. Eugenic reformers drafted immigration acts restricting emigrants from Asia and Eastern Europe from entering the United States. Domestically, they pursued policies and regulations seeking to racially and culturally "purify" the nation through segregation and anti-miscegenation laws, forced sterilization, and controls on marriage and childbearing. (Ordover, Nancy, 2003, xii).

10. As scholar Ann Cheng has noted about the early twentieth-century response to Josephine Baker's performances, "For the racist, nakedness signals rawness, animality, dumb flesh and is repeatedly invoked as the sign of the other" (2010, 12).

11. This elongated vertical carriage was a way of carrying oneself that Robin Veder dubs "lift." Lift for her is a physiological as well as architectural quality of upward momentum, referencing the lifted chest, throat, and neck that follows a deep inhalation of breath, which even the still body can project when arrested in a statuesque pose. Veder derives her concept of lift as a prevalent early twentieth-century energy on cultural historian Hillel Schwartz's influential work on "torque," the forceful spiraling dynamic of a body marked by the coiled energy of implicit movement, a quality privileged in turn-of-the-century body culture practices and exemplified by heroic Hellenic sculpture and architecture. (Vedar, Robin, 68–69).

12. Long's research reveals that "although African Americans had matriculated at the UW since 1862, they were often excluded from white social events and faced with ardent racism... A 1942 survey conducted by the *Daily Cardinal* revealed that 95 percent of housemothers on the university's list of approved rooming houses preferred not to rent rooms to black students. 'Many Negro, and to a lesser degree Chinese and Jewish, students have been denied rooms that are vacant and have been forced into outlying districts or have been forced away from the university altogether,' the study noted" (Long, Harvey, 2).

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