Introduction

> I believe that an understanding of where schools have been and of what social forces affect them at present is extraordinarily useful for interpreting our present state of affairs. Without an historical perspective our analyses are likely to be naive and misguided.
>
> Elliot Eisner, keynote address, Pennsylvania State University, 1989

In the summer of 1925, the newly launched American theatrical dance quarterly, *The Denishawn Magazine*, carried a three-page review of a new book on dance education, *The Dance, and Its Place in Education.* The *Denishawn Magazine* had been begun a year earlier, primarily as a vehicle for two of the leading American theatrical dancers of the time, Ruth St. Denis and her husband and partner, Ted Shawn, and their own professional schools of dance, Denishawn.[1] The review was unusual on two counts: first, it presented St. Denis devoting pages to a book by another dance teacher, and second, St. Denis not only seriously considered but praised the work of this teacher and author, Margaret H'Doubler, a physical educator.[2]

Although both the fields of American modern dance and dance in American higher education were in their infancy in the 1920s, already there was some tension between the two disciplines.[3] For reasons of territoriality as well as survival, H'Doubler had defined her educational dance as distinct from the modern dance of the stage. A full rapprochement would be years in coming, but St. Denis's gesture in reviewing Margaret H'Doubler's first book was an acknowledgment of her esteem for this woman who was on her way to becoming the doyenne of American dance

education. St. Denis's "review," therefore, is fascinating for what it reveals of this division between the educational and modern or theatrical arenas of dance and what it coincidentally suggests about the role of a determined individual's sensibility in affecting educational change.

St. Denis begins by situating her review as a platform for disagreement. She objects to an observation H'Doubler makes in the opening of her book, that the stimulation for the emerging curricular field of dance education has come from a scholarly interest in physical education.[4] "Not so!" St. Denis declares. "Nearly all phases of music interpretation and of what is loosely called 'Greek Dancing' [educational dance] in this country, owe their genesis to Isadora Duncan."[5] This question of the provenance of dance education was crucial and, as became apparent over the subsequent seven decades, profoundly divisive. For any art form in education, the context of whether one is training students to be artists or training students for life profoundly shapes the whole enterprise of the classroom. "Let us not forget that art leads, and education follows," St. Denis cautions. "First there is always the new circle drawn by the philosopher, the inventor, the poet, the artist; then education in its orderly classification and practice follows."[6]

In fact, both women were right; they were describing the truths for their respective areas of dance, theater, and academia. H'Doubler's search for and discovery of dance was motivated by her supervisor Blanche Trilling's direction and her own desire to broaden the university's physical education curriculum for women. St. Denis, by contrast, saw herself, along with Isadora Duncan, as introducing an American voice into concert dance. Behind both these innovators lay similar late nineteenth-century systems of physical movement—François Delsarte's methods and the German *turnvereine* gymnasiums, most prominently.

The differences between St. Denis's and H'Doubler's viewpoints on dance played out with particular clarity in their approach to dance teaching. The Denishawn schools were an important part of the major cultural empire known as Denishawn, which, during the period of 1922 to 1925, franchised dance schools in a dozen American cities. As a means of identifying and training performers for the Denishawn company, these schools were also an efficient way to earn money to help support the tours of the performing group.[7] H'Doubler, in contrast, saw herself as giving students the power to link emotional and physical understanding in order to become better adjusted and more efficacious individuals in the world. These were vantage points that would be central to this dialogue for the next eighty years.

Ruth St. Denis and Margaret H'Doubler were both pioneers. St. Denis had turned her back on the popular-culture musical theater of the time in favor of more elite entertainment, and H'Doubler never personally

explored musical theater dance before deciding her form of dance would be radically different and significantly more respectable. In their own ways both women would link dance to a new portrait of the American woman. This was not a simplistic image of American women, but rather multifaceted and complex, and dance in American education would figure significantly in it. As a messenger relaying the private studio practice of dance into the university, H'Doubler also invariably brought part of her own personal history as well.

Both the immediate educational context in which H'Doubler worked and the larger social context of the time in which she lived (1889–1982) offered significant challenges as H'Doubler attempted to shape dance educationally. H'Doubler was a "new woman" in the sense that the womanhood she defined for herself encompassed contradictory discourses on gender difference, sexuality, motherhood, work, and the family.[8] H'Doubler was genteel but also staunchly independent: when it was still considered risqué to do so she bobbed her hair, rode horses aggressively, and was a single working woman into her forties, when she entered into a marriage with a man significantly younger than herself. H'Doubler continued to teach at the University of Wisconsin while her husband taught in another city, and they saw each other mostly on weekends in one of the first commuting marriages. H'Doubler never had children.

Like the Gibson Girl prototype made famous by the illustrator Charles Dana Gibson during the 1910s, H'Doubler enjoyed athleticism but was always careful to temper it with grace. "The Gibson girl was a figure of accommodation," feminist art historian Ellen Wiley Todd comments. "She mirrored the aspirations of many young women who wanted both possibilities and limits." H'Doubler, like the Gibson Girl Todd describes, balanced an independent manner with a care not to "radically challenge patriarchal assumptions."[9] To the degree that she was a personification of a Gibson Girl in academia, H'Doubler maintained her status as a charming upper-middle-class woman while also forging ahead as an athlete and, later, an educational innovator. In both arenas she represented a moderate discourse of new womanhood. H'Doubler's simultaneous negotiation of contradictory and moderate discourses of womanhood reflects the social complexity of the time, which left women caught between beckoning possibilities and persistent limitations.

H'Doubler entered the University of Wisconsin at Madison in the fall of 1906 as part of the wave of women from upper-middle-class social groups who found going to college socially acceptable in the transitional era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As a college woman herself in this period, H'Doubler understood vividly the paradox of possibilities coupled with limitations encountered by women in higher education. Women were in the university, but they were also restricted

to classes, majors, and professions deemed acceptable, by an overwhelmingly male administration, to women. At the very least, education for H'Doubler, as for other women of her time, introduced the possibility of an identity outside the home-and-family model. It also both invited and encouraged women to think of themselves, at least marginally, in opposition to confining norms, since a scant few years earlier even being in college would have been a rarity.[10]

So the social situation in which H'Doubler found herself, caught between two worlds, invited a dramatically altered perspective on society. Historian Rosalind Rosenberg describes the two worlds of this time as "the Victorian world of domesticity with its restrictive view of femininity, and the rapidly expanding commercial world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with its beckoning opportunities."[11]

As a woman in higher education, though, H'Doubler was already a step outside the Victorian norm before she ever embarked on teaching her first dance class. As a native-born, middle-class woman, she also belonged to the strongest locus of what Todd calls "the new womanhood."[12] Not only was the Victorian concept of separate existences for men and women being eroded, but the divide between the Victorian and commercial worldviews was slipping as well. The commercial worldview, initially in opposition to the Victorian, would eventually replace it. For H'Doubler this would be crucial, giving her a new social context and model for how she might willfully assume the status of an iconoclast once she began her innovations in women's education.

Yet H'Doubler was never a flamboyant radical. Even when her personal needs prompted her to make what were for the time dramatic changes, she either hid or, if necessary, revoked them. For example, she cut her hair short while studying at Columbia University during a one-year leave of absence from the University of Wisconsin. H'Doubler had yearned for the comfort of short hair for a long time, but once she cut it she kept it hidden by carefully tucking it up as if it were still long. When she returned to the University of Wisconsin she dutifully reported her transgression and offered to resign if the dean of women so chose.[13] Likewise, she stopped the little touring program of dance lecture-demonstrations she initially organized with her students the moment President Birge of the University of Wisconsin chastised her for lending the school the image of a center for dancing.[14]

It is particularly interesting that, contrary to what one would expect of one of the leading pioneers of dance in higher education, H'Doubler was never really a fan of dance as an art form. She considered Martha Graham "a little too professional," as she once remarked to her students after a Graham performance in Chicago.[15] She neither attended concerts with regularity nor followed the great dance artists of the time, with