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Claire Bishop

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The Perils and Possibilities of Dance in the Museum: Tate, MoMA, and Whitney

Claire Bishop

Every few years, a burning topic appears to crop up in almost every single conversation with friends and colleagues invested in performance. Currently, that topic is “dance in the museum”—by which I mean the specific problem of programming dance *in the gallery space* rather than in a dedicated black-box theater attached to an art gallery or museum (as found at multidisciplinary arts centers, for example). In the last three or four years, discussions about dance in the museum have decisively taken over from those about re-enactment, which somehow climaxed and fizzled out with Marina Abramović’s *The Artist Is Present* (2010). It has also displaced all talk about performance as a component of parallel programming to exhibitions, which now seems to occur as regularly as talks and related screenings. At the same time, the question of how to acquire and display performance as part of a museum’s permanent collection is far from fully resolved.

The art world’s current fascination with dance follows on from a previous high point of interaction in the late 1960s and 1970s, and before that, a moment in the late 1930s and early 1940s. I am going to refer to these as the first, second, and third waves of dance in the museum. But despite this long and healthy—albeit intermittent—history of dance programming at museums, the current debate seems to revolve primarily around three collection-based institutions: the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, and Tate Modern in London. All three have recently begun to show dance on a new scale and to new ends (although it should be noted that MoMA and the Whitney played important roles in the first and second waves).¹ Since the turn of the millennium, each of these institutions has reached out to incorporate dance into the museum in different ways. This essay seeks to sketch these institutional histories, to draw out the differences between their approaches and trajectories, and to highlight some of the ongoing possibilities and problems of presenting dance in the museum. The aim is not to be comprehensive, but to offer a quick survey, prejudiced by my own experiences on both sides of the Atlantic, for others to elaborate or reject.

The Museum of Modern Art

Alfred Barr’s original scheme for MoMA was inspired by the Bauhaus in Dessau, with departments not just of painting and sculpture, but film, photography, architecture, and design. Surprisingly, given Bauhaus’s achievements in theater and set design, this original plan did not include dance and performance. Instead, MoMA’s first wave of dance in the museum began in 1939, when it

Claire Bishop is a professor in the PhD Program in Art History at the Graduate Center, City University of New York. Her books include *Installation Art: A Critical History* (2005), *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012), and *Radical Museology, or, What’s Contemporary in Museums of Contemporary Art?* (2013). She is a regular contributor to *Artforum*.

accepted into the library the archive of writer and impresario Lincoln Kirstein, who was on the museum's Advisory Committee and went on to found the New York City Ballet with George Balanchine in 1948.² Kirstein's dance archive comprised historical and contemporary books, prints, photographs, slides, films, and other ephemera. In 1944, the dance archive became the basis of a curatorial division, the Department of Dance and Theatre Design, which acquired and exhibited works of art relating to the stage (Chagall, Larionov, Goncharova). During this period, dance was never performed in the museum's galleries; instead, only the ephemera relating to stage performances were exhibited, with an emphasis on set design.³ In-house and touring exhibitions about dance included *Isadora Duncan: Drawings, Photographs, Memorabilia*, *Anna Pavlova Memorial Exhibition*, and *Modern American Dance*. In 1946, the historical part of the archive (approximately 250 books) was transferred to Harvard University, and the department was renamed the Department of Theatre Arts. It was eventually dissolved two years later, whereupon its contemporary holdings returned to their former status as a division of the library.

Although MoMA showed performances intermittently through the 1960s (most notably, Jean Tinguely's *Homage to New York* in 1960, Allan Kaprow's *Push and Pull* in 1963, and Yayoi Kusama's *Grand Orgy* in 1968), MoMA's second wave of dance did not begin until the Summergarden series, an outdoor program that pulled together visual art, theater, performance, and music, was initiated in 1971. Dance was represented by the Multi Gravitational Dance Group in 1972 and again in 1973 (an aerial work for six dancers on a 15- by 26-foot scaffold supporting a number of devices that the dancers use to move, including ropes, slings, and a plastic tube). Also performing during the 1973 season was Elaine Summers, one of the founders of Judson Dance Theater, who installed dancers and musicians and projected films amid the trees, fountains, and sculptures; visitors were invited to wander among them ("bells and gongs will be offered to invite audience participation") (Breatore 2009, 17). Laura Forman created a ten-person dance that incorporated two children, an opera singer, and several cloth dummies, interspersed with solo performances by the electronic music composer John Watts on his ARP string synthesizer. But dance in the Summergarden was at best intermittent, and the only other production of note after the early 1970s took place in 1979, when Simone Forti performed *Big Room* with musician Peter Van Riper.

This history feels completely different in tenor and ambition to what is going on today. Located outdoors and unrelated to the galleries, the Summergarden was basically event programming—a summer diversion rather than part of a historical narrative. Although the Sculpture Garden has recently been used for dance (most memorably, a performance of Paulina Ołowska's 2005 *Alphabet* in 2012), today MoMA tends to present dance *within* the museum's galleries, which is organized by the Department of Media and Performance. (The department was created in 2009; it was formerly known as the Department of Media, which was created as a breakaway from the Film Department in 2006.) The recent incursion of dance and performance into MoMA's atrium accompanied this departmental rebranding, and is a constant source of contention among artists and critics. Designed by Yoshio Taniguchi, MoMA's atrium opened in 2006 as a pristine but sterile vertical shaft, seemingly designed for corporate parties; its scale and atmosphere of prestige and capital has the unwelcome side effect of making experimental performance look under-rehearsed and unprofessional, rather than intimate and nuanced. Nowhere is the question of dance in the museum more fraught than at MoMA: the lure of the museum's reputation and status seems irresistible to all artists, yet its architectural confines are arguably the least conducive to their practice, and acoustics are a perennial problem. Under Klaus Biesenbach (now director of MoMA PS1), the Department of Performance and Media staged a number of high-profile performances in the atrium during 2010—most memorably Abramović's *The Artist Is Present*, but also Allora and Calzadilla's *Repair, Prepare: Variations on Ode to Joy for a Prepared Piano* (2008) and Yoko Ono's participatory *Voice Piece for Soprano* (1961). Of these, only Abramović's performance—theatrically hushed and cinematically spectacular—really held the space. The others were visually and sonically adrift.

The decision to use the atrium for dance performances was accelerated by the arrival of Kathy Halbreich as associate director of MoMA in 2009. Previously director of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis since 1992, where she built an impressive legacy (a fully functioning theater, the McGuire, which opened in 2005, and a major endowment for commissioning new works in dance and performing arts), Halbreich has brought into the fold at MoMA many of the artists with whom she worked in Minneapolis (Ralph Lemon, Sarah Michelson, Trisha Brown). Halbreich's interests merged with those of curator Connie Butler in the dance program accompanying the latter's exhibition *On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century* (2010–2011). Over the course of five weekends in early 2011, the choreographers Trisha Brown, Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, Marie Cool and Fabio Balducci, Ralph Lemon, and Xavier Le Roy all attempted to bring life to the atrium. Some of the performers made good use of the space: de Keersmaeker strewed the floor with sand for *Violin Phase* (the third movement of *Fase*, 1982); her feet left traces that accumulated like a mandala over the course of the performance; the design was particularly effective when viewed from the upper floors. Le Roy began his solo *Self-Unfinished* (1998) at 5:30 p.m. as the crowds were being ushered out of the building; over the course of the performance, the clanging background cacophony diminished to a taut silence in which you could hear yourself breathe. Trisha Brown's dancers, clad entirely in red, performed on balconies and in windows overlooking the atrium during *Roof Piece Re-Layered* (2011), punctuating the space with a spiral of points rising through four stories.

The two major dance series to have taken place since *On Line* have manifested a greater struggle with the space. *Some Sweet Day*, organized by Ralph Lemon in 2012, was a three-week program of dance performances that included intergenerational pairings of younger choreographers and seminal older figures (e.g., Michelson and Deborah Hay). The juxtaposition of Steve Paxton and Jérôme Bel was perhaps most revealing, not just in terms of dance history (Bel owes a huge debt to Paxton), but in terms of how much dance can offer—and resist—the mega-museum. Paxton presented *Satisfyin Lover* (1967) and *State* (1968), two works of disarming economy and simplicity: in the former, a mix of professional dancers and amateurs walks across a stage (in this case, the west side of the atrium), starting and stopping according to a simple score; in the latter, the same group of forty-one performers stands motionless in a cluster for several minutes. This was truly the degree-zero of choreography—the elementary movements of walking and standing still—and both pieces were profoundly moving in their presentation of idiosyncratic humanity. In its mute, sculptural refusal to entertain, *State* in particular induced an overwhelming pang at seeing the frailty and contingency of human life. This stasis seemed especially poignant in the context of MoMA's turbo-powered weekend tourist turnover.

Bel presented an excerpt of *The Show Must Go On* (2001), a work that also comprises a combination of professionals and amateur performers. The full-length version involves twenty dancers moving to twenty pop songs: simple gestures that offer an amusingly literal interpretation of each song's frequently corny lyrics. Crucially, the work is designed for full proscenium staging, for only then does the audacity (and criticality) of Bel's assault on traditional ideas of choreographic skill and disciplinary accomplishment become apparent. In the MoMA atrium, by contrast, the work was abbreviated to ten songs, and the performers were well-known local performers from the dance and theater worlds. The contrast was striking. Shown in a theater, *The Show Must Go On* tempers straightforward crowd-pleasing entertainment with refusal, bathos, the anonymity of distance, and entire songs where nothing happens. These qualities were completely lost in MoMA's atrium, where it became a carnival of local stars performing the "best of" Bel's work for their peers, while the general public craned to look on from the upper levels. Meanwhile, the loud pop music played into all the worst tendencies of museum-as-spectacle, exacerbated once again by poor acoustics. MoMA looked like a great-uncle trying to breakdance.

MoMA's second dance series in the atrium, a collaboration with Boris Charmatz entitled *Three Collective Gestures*, was staged over three weekends in October 2013 and brought other problems

to light. Charmatz is director of the National Choreographic Center in Rennes, which he has renamed Musée de la Danse; the invitation to perform at MoMA was a great opportunity to put the two institutions in dialogue. In fact, his work struggled to relate to the space, despite the choreographer's abundant energy and sheer determination to make it happen. *Twenty Dancers for the XX Century* (2012) comprises twenty performers demonstrating their own (or others') dances, occasionally pausing to converse with the audience, and was first shown in a large public library in Rennes that also hosts the Musée de Bretagne. There, the twenty dancers performed in the library, the museum, the entrance hall, the staircases, and interstitial spaces. At MoMA, the work was dispersed through a range of galleries over five floors—including the garden, the atrium, and the stairwells—between 12 and 5 p.m. one weekend. At best, the piece brought a dynamic energy to the galleries, and created multiple lines of spectatorship: my personal highlight was watching a school group looking up at the steel slab of Richard Serra's *Delineator* (1974–1975), oblivious to Shelley Senter at their feet performing Trisha Brown's *Accumulation* (1971). Yet, ultimately, *20 Dancers* left me with the conclusion that the traffic between dance and the museum is one-way, and always on the museum's terms: dance animates the galleries of the museum, but ultimately the museum flattens and homogenizes our experience of dance. Call it the Tino Sehgal effect—gallery lighting enhances the objects, but not the performers inserting themselves in between these works. Unfortunately, every instance of dancing in the gallery now looks and feels like a Tino Sehgal, even if the content is wildly different.⁴

This year, the Performance and Media Department has started to employ the fourth-floor Werner and Elaine Dannheisser Lobby Gallery as a more intimate (and acoustically superior) space for performance than the atrium. The space succeeds not only symbolically—facing off the entrance to the Painting and Sculpture displays, performance is (almost) elevated to a comparable status in the collection—but also visually, as the east wall of the gallery is entirely glass, overlooking the Sculpture Garden and the city beyond. As the sun set during Charlemagne Palestine and Simone Forti's *ill-lummmminnnatttionnnsssss!!!!!!* in April 2014, the Manhattan skyline seemed to become a third performer in the work, slowly plunged into inky blackness as the evening wore on. With the arrival of Stuart Comer as director in 2013 (replacing Sabine Breitwieser, 2010–2013), the performance community is keen to know whether the department will take a new direction—although it will still have to contend with Klaus Biesenbach intermittently programming the atrium with popular acts like Kraftwerk (2012) and Björk (2015). In the meantime, the department is expressing its commitment to dance through a forthcoming series of monographic publications dedicated to choreographers and an exhibition co-curated by Jérôme Bel.

The more pressing issue is the question of MoMA's expansion into the former American Folk Art Museum, directly opposite its premises on 53rd Street. Both MoMA and architects Diller Scofidio & Renfro (DS&R) have come under fire for the impending demolition of the AFAM, but the architects' proposal seeks to improve visitor circulation, create a stronger link to the urban fabric, and to soften what Liz Diller (2014) refers to as the "too aloof," "clinical," and "sanitized" feel of the Museum. Performance plays a crucial role in this redesign: although the expansion will create only thirty percent more gallery space, performance will be housed in a "gray box" (a combination of white cube and black box) and in a glass-fronted contemporary art and performance space on the first floor facing 53rd Street. The latter is part of DS&R's proposal to make this floor free and open to the public (including the Sculpture Garden), although whether performance will benefit from this context or feel like a cheap enticement leading to the ticketed pleasures of Monet, Picasso, et al., remains to be seen. Some critics have already complained that the new design privileges performance and event culture rather than the presentation of pre-1980 art, which requires a more intimate architecture conducive to quiet concentration.⁵ But don't dance and performance *also* require focus and concentration? The point is that spaces that pander to audience-grabbing event culture do not serve *any* art form well—be this performance, dance, or pre-1980 painting.

Tate Modern

Tate came late to the performance party: dance was almost completely absent from the museum while MoMA experienced its first two waves.⁶ But the British institution was first off the mark with the third wave when, in 2002, its marketing manager made an agreement with the online bank Egg to fund a series of performance events across both Tate Modern and Tate Britain. Alex Poots was hired to orchestrate the more populist end of this program, while Catherine Wood was hired to produce edgier works by a younger generation.⁷ The star-studded half of the Egg Live program was somewhat opportunistic: as Alex Farquharson (2003) noted in *Frieze*, it was “pieced together in response to a development department’s fundraising coup rather than an artistic zeitgeist.” Instead of inviting artists whose work already spanned visual art and performance, Poots paired up Turner Prize winners with international stars—Anish Kapoor with composer Arvo Pärt and director Peter Sellars, Steve McQueen with soprano Jessye Norman and singer-songwriter PJ Harvey. But Poots also commissioned the first dance works at Tate, inviting physical theater company DV8 to rework *The Cost of Living* (2003) as an ambulatory work that included circus, vaudeville, clowning, a fight scene on the Turbine Hall bridge, and the audience split into color-coded groups. Later that year, the museum collaborated with Dance Umbrella to bring a series of Merce Cunningham Events to the Turbine Hall, performed beneath the acrid yellow glow of Olafur Eliasson’s installation *The Weather Project* (2003–2004). As is well known, Cunningham tailored each Event to the venue in which his company was performing; faced with the hangar-like dimensions of the Turbine Hall, he split the space into three performing areas, around which the public was free to roam. These were the first of Cunningham’s Events to fracture the performance into multiple stages (Crimp 2008), setting the precedent for his later performances at Dia:Beacon and the final Event at the Park Avenue Armory in 2012.

Wood’s program was initially more intermittent and low-key, focusing on an emergent generation of visual artists interested in performance. Among the memorable early highlights in 2003 were Mark Leckey placing a sound system facing Jacob Epstein’s sculpture *Jacob and the Angel* (1940–1941) in the Tate Britain rotunda, Lali (now Marvin Gaye) Chetwynd devising a performance around Richard Dadd’s painting *The Fairy Feller’s Master-Stroke* (1855–1864) in the Pre-Raphaelite gallery, and Carlos Amorales organizing a Mexican wrestling performance on the Turbine Hall bridge. A year later, Ian White and Jimmy Robert showed *6 things we couldn’t do but can do now* at Tate Britain, for which the artists were taught Yvonne Rainer’s *Trio A* (1966) by Pat Catterson. The Tate Triennial in 2006 included several visual artists interested in dance and/or social choreography: Pablo Bronstein worked with a group of Baroque dance enthusiasts (*Intermezzo*), Linder presented three rock bands and four women performing the gestures of Shaker worship (*The Working Class Goes to Paradise*), Chetwynd offered a carnivalesque puppet play (*The Fall of Man*), and Tino Sehgal trained a singer to perform *This Is Propaganda* (2002). In the meantime, Tate had begun acquiring score-based performances, beginning with Roman Ondák’s artificial queue *Good Feelings in Good Times* (2003) and the aforementioned work by Sehgal. Wood has described how the museum’s interest in programming dance emerged organically from working with younger artists who were appropriating dance or were interested in choreographing social relations.⁸

Inevitably, this direction of programming included a return to historic works of the Judson generation: in 2006, Trisha Brown restaged *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building*, first performed on a six-story building in Wooster Street in 1970. At Tate Modern, the performer was strapped into a harness and rather falteringly descended the former power station’s vast façade to a crowd of onlookers. This version of Brown’s work had none of the precision and austerity that we associate with her downtown performances of the 1970s (which I, like many others, only know through Peter Moore’s photography).⁹ In this respect, it was similar to the Tate’s hugely popular 2009 restaging of Robert Morris’s participatory installation *Bodyspacemotionthings*: a replica of the artist’s notorious exhibition at Tate Millbank in 1971. Comprising plywood props akin to those Morris designed

for Simone Forti's performances in the early 1960s, the 1971 show was cancelled after four days due to overenthusiastic audience participation and injury. In 2009, these works were remade, albeit with a few modulations to meet Health & Safety requirements. Yet the runaway popularity of *Bodyspacemotionthings*—its four-day run was extended to two weeks—highlights one of the central problems with Tate Modern's approach to performance, namely, that it is a victim of its own success. While Morris regarded his work as "an opportunity for people to . . . be aware of their own bodies, gravity, effort, fatigue, their bodies under different conditions," it was hard to focus on such subtleties when having to wait your turn to clamber aboard a plywood ramp, surrounded by noisy crowds of hyperactive children and frenzied families (Higgins 2009, 5). The historical value of reconstruction was tempered, and ultimately dwarfed, by the Tate Modern machine. Although Morris's project was remade to scale, the museum has often been guilty of supersizing performance to match the museum's size and popularity: Alison Knowles's modest instruction-based *Make a Salad*, first performed in 1962, was remade for hundreds of people at Tate Modern in 2008, while Pawel Althamer's *Realtime Movie*, first staged almost imperceptibly in Ljubljana in 2000, was remade with Jude Law in 2007, attracting a screaming mob of fans in Borough Market.

The somber gray concrete of the Turbine Hall is in many ways the apotheosis of post-1990s European museum building—a repurposed post-industrial space that provides hangar-like conditions for viewing installation, film, and performance. Tate Modern seems to handle the scale and atmosphere of the Turbine Hall best when it forges dance/installation crossovers, either setting works alongside pre-existing installations (Cunningham inside Eliasson) or turning the performance area into a quasi-installation space. In 2008, three short works by the British minimalist choreographer Rosemary Butcher—*Images Every Three Seconds*, *The Hour*, and *Hidden Voices*—were performed on the Turbine Hall bridge, with Rachel Whiteread's equally austere *Embankment* in the background. A year later, William Forsythe performed *Nowhere and Everywhere at the Same Time*, a dance/installation produced in collaboration with Sadler's Wells Theatre. Originally made for one dancer and forty pendulums on New York's High Line in 2005, Forsythe's piece in its Tate iteration was enlarged to a forest of 200 pendulums and 19 dancers; viewers watched from the Turbine Hall bridge and along the edges of the performance space.¹⁰ A further solution to the size/scale dilemma was arrived at in 2010 when Michael Clark became the first (and, to date, only) choreographer-in-residence at Tate Modern. Clark had attended the Cunningham Events in 2003 and was fascinated by the possibility of dance in a venue the size of the Turbine Hall; however, he also needed space to develop and rehearse a piece that would work on that scale. The conclusion brokered was that he would work on his commission during the museum's opening hours, so that casual audiences could watch the rehearsals.

Unused to rehearsing in public, Clark reportedly found the experience torturous, but also used this as an opportunity to push his work in the direction of participation. Over the course of seven weeks during summer 2010, a group of 78 non-professionals was trained by eight of Clark's company to perform a basic choreographic sequence to David Bowie's *It's No Game (Part 1)*, the conclusion to his work *Come, Been and Gone*—basic moves, but (as I can testify from joining in rehearsals one night) still taxing. The Turbine Hall was equipped with a sprung floor painted in geometrical black-and-white patterns that echoed the vertical grid of the east window, so even when no one was rehearsing, the space looked visually occupied. The performance was presented free and unticketed over four nights in August 2010, the culminating piece in a program of recent works by Clark.¹¹ Since opening in 2000, the Tate has placed a high premium on participation, in tune with UK cultural funding priorities: from Morris's *Bodyspacemotionthings* to Carsten Höller's sinuous high-speed slides (*Test Site*, 2006) to a slew of smaller participatory performances presented as part of the *Long Weekend* series (most memorably, Jiří Kovanda's *Kissing Through Glass*, 2007).

In summer 2012, Tate Modern opened the Tanks, three circular spaces dedicated to installation and performance, part of an ongoing expansion by Herzog and de Meuron to double the museum's

exhibition and display space. Only one of the Tanks is equipped with a full lighting rig, and none has a sprung floor. In their shape and mood, the Tanks are quite different from the fully equipped “black box” of alternative theater, and are permeated with a somber gray austerity that is more rough, ready, and focused than the Turbine Hall. The opening season included Boris Charmatz’s *Flip Book/50 Years of Dance* (2009), a mass performance of Rainer’s *Trio A*, a new work by Eddie Peake (*Amidst a Sea of Flailing High Heels and Cooking Utensils, Part 1*), Nina Beier’s *The Complete Works* (2009), and most impressively, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker’s *Fase* (1982), which was adapted to the conditions of museum spectatorship following her presentation of *Violin Phase* in the round at MoMA. Rather than dancing the four movements in succession as a single piece, after museum hours, for a paying audience, De Keersmaeker performed each movement separately, at regular intervals over the course of a day, for three days. The original proscenium presentation was replaced by informal floor-cushioned seating, allowing the work to be seen from all four sides, whereby it achieved a more sculptural character, particularly given the continuity of the dancers’ quasi-industrial gray outfits with the Tanks’ architecture. While disrupting the sense of pattern and variation that derives from seeing all four movements in sequence, the payoff was accessibility: allowing the general public to come in and see a world-class choreographer performing her signature work, for free. Since opening, The Tanks have had an erratic program due to funding priorities and a delayed building schedule; the long-term plan is to use the spaces for a combination of permanent collection, live performance, film, and education.

Whitney Museum of American Art

Of the three museums discussed in this article, the Whitney Museum has the longest, most intense relationship to the performing arts across all media (music, theater, poetry, performance art, and dance). When the museum first opened in Greenwich Village in 1931, it supported avant-garde composers like Edgard Varèse, who was offered the Whitney Studio Club as the home for his International Composers’ Guild, and staged works by Igor Stravinsky, Carl Ruggles, and Henry Cowell. Music concerts continued to be the museum’s primary mode of interest in performance when it moved to its current location on 75th Street in 1966. In the early days, this included chamber music and choral groups, contemporary music (John Cage, Morton Feldman, Philip Glass, Steve Reich), jazz (Charles Mingus, Ornette Coleman), and even Sun Ra. Most of these events were promoted under the remit of the long-running series *Composer’s Showcase*, directed by Charles Schwartz—a composer, author, and concert impresario who was studying for his doctorate in musicology at NYU. The series was held on Tuesday nights, events were free (or cheap), audiences sat on floor cushions, and performers were encouraged to play in tune with the environment. The gallery was often specially hung for the performance with works from the permanent collection.

It was as part of the *Composer’s Showcase* series that the Whitney Museum’s most celebrated dance performances took place: Yvonne Rainer’s *Continuous Project—Altered Daily* (performed over three nights in Spring 1970) and Trisha Brown’s *Walking on the Wall*, shown as part of her *Another Fearless Dance Concert* (1971). Less well known is that Deborah Hay was the first choreographer to appear under this rubric (in 1969), followed by Meredith Monk (1970), Steve Paxton and Alex Hay (1971), and Lucinda Childs (1973). Hay (1968) obtained the third floor galleries by writing directly to museum director John Baur, arguing that the work of her contemporaries, including herself, “has found its greatest support from the art audience, patrons and artists.” She also cited her previous pieces made in museums and art galleries: Seattle Art Pavilion, Vancouver Art Gallery, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Walker Art Center, Moderna Museet in Stockholm, and Sogetsu Art Center in Tokyo.¹² Her list gives an idea of just how many museums were involved in this second wave of dance programming during the 1960s. At LACMA, Hay danced on the grounds immediately surrounding the museum; at the Whitney, she requested a large uninterrupted area suitable for performance in the round by about 20 performers. Performed at the Whitney over

several nights during February 1969, Hay's *911* brought together three different works, each using specially constructed wooden ramps.¹³

It seems that while Schwartz took the lead in directing the *Composer's Showcase* series, the museum administrator Stephen Weil was responsible for inviting choreographers. He approached Rainer in 1970 for *Continuous Project—Altered Daily* and again for *Performance* in 1971. From 1968 until he left the museum in 1974, Weil reported on the Whitney's performing arts program for the annual *Whitney Review*, noting the overwhelming popularity of these events among both performers and audiences, due to the distinctive venue, low ticket prices, and informal cushioned seating (people could also wander around the galleries).¹⁴ He also explained that most of the dance events were presented as part of the *Composer's Showcase* series because they often exposed audiences to new musical compositions. For one event in 1973, for example, Christian Wolff's *Foot Music* was followed by Merce Cunningham's solo *Loops and Additions*, accompanied by Wolff.¹⁵ This continued to be the case as late as 1984, when Lucinda Childs's program introduced audiences to the music of Gavin Bryars and Jon Gibson.

From 1974 to 1981, the Whitney's performance program also took place at the museum's downtown branch at 55 Water Street, and from 1981 onward, at the landmarked Federal Hall National Monument on Maiden Lane. Its weekly lunchtime events were programmed by David Hupert (then head of education) and curator Lisa Phillips (currently director of the New Museum) and varied from performance art (Laurie Anderson, Stuart Sherman) to theater (Arthur Miller, Spalding Gray, a full production of *Twelfth Night*) to music (including chamber music and a Gamelan ensemble), the last of which made up the majority of performances. In 1982, a lunchtime dance series curated by dance critic Craig Bromner, "*Movement + Modernism*," featured Ishmael Houston-Jones, Wendy Perron, Sally Silvers, and others, many of whom danced alongside film and video.¹⁶ Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Whitney also held free lunchtime performances at two of its corporate-funded branches, the Champion or Fairfield County branch (in Stamford, Connecticut) and the Philip Morris branch (located in the lobby of its headquarters at Park Avenue and 42nd Street).¹⁷ The latter was programmed for over ten years by Jeanette Vuocolo, who specialized in commissioning artists to respond to the building's vast glass atrium. Meanwhile, the museum occasionally showed choreographers in the main building, as with Childs's retrospective of solo works mentioned above.¹⁸

Aside from a William Forsythe performance at the Performing Garage as part of the 1997 Whitney Biennial, dance at the Whitney has since the 1980s been an intermittent occurrence rather than part of a regular curated program; its appearance mirrored the art world's fluctuating relationship to the discipline in general. Performance by visual artists has been equally sporadic; it makes an appearance roughly every ten years: eighteen performances over two days in June 1982 as part of Nam June Paik's retrospective (involving a long list of Fluxus collaborators), the 1993 Whitney Biennial (a sprinkling of theater, dance, and art), and the 2002 Biennial (Walid Raad, Sanford Biggers, Zhang Huan, William Pope L, and others). A handful of offsite performances accompanied the 2004 Biennial, but choreography was not made an integral part of any Biennial until 2012, when curators Jay Sanders and Elizabeth Sussmann dedicated the Emily Fisher Landau galleries, on the fourth floor of the museum, to dance and performance. Sanders looked back to two precedents in the Whitney's own history for this curatorial decision: the *Composer's Showcase* series, which had also cleared an entire floor of the museum for performance, and *4 Evenings in 4 Days*, a performance festival in 1976 that included Guy de Cointet, Richard Foreman, Laurie Anderson, and Robert Wilson, among others.¹⁹

Sanders's use of the fourth-floor gallery was stunning: wall dividers were removed, bleachers were constructed along the length of the south wall, and the building's trapezoidal window was exposed in all its graphic clarity. Two choreographers were invited to be "in residence": New York-based Sarah Michelson and London-based Michael Clark. Michelson's performance made fantastic use

of the space, with the walls bare apart from a glowing green neon logo of her head, and a sprung floor printed with an architectural floor plan of the museum. Four dancers performed a grueling sequence of hypnotic and repetitive reverse circles; *Devotion Study #1* deservedly won the Bucksbaum Award for best work in the Biennial. Clark's effort, *Who's Zoo?*, was less convincing, and—as at Tate—featured amateur participation. If Michelson responded to the space by working from its physical characteristics and mood, Clark began from the problem of continuous visitors. His solution was open rehearsals and several levels of participation, from those who wandered in and wanted to join a rehearsal, to local amateurs who had been with the project for a few weeks and then performed in the ticketed evening shows. But the participatory approach played out differently in New York. In Clark's work for the Turbine Hall, any imprecision in the amateurs' performances was overwhelmed by scale; effect won out over execution. In the more intimate confines of the Whitney, viewers were up close to the performers and all their hesitations. For those who remembered Clark at his best in the 1980s and 1990s, *Who's Zoo?* was a baggy mess.

The 2012 Biennial was also notable for its creative solution to the need for a dressing room. Wu Tsang's installation *Green Room* (2012) served as a private space with mirrors and wardrobe for the dancers, actors, and musicians participating in the Biennial; when not in use, it hosted a two-channel video installation about a gay bar in Los Angeles called Wildness, and the drag queens who perform there. The oscillation between these functions enhanced both: as an actual dressing room, the installation acquired an authentic atmosphere over the course of the exhibition that made the video seem all the more immersive. After the 2012 Biennial, Sanders was hired as the Whitney's first performance curator, and Michelson returned to the fourth-floor gallery with *4* (2014), another minimalist work of choreographic endurance (this time involving somersaults). Yet returning to the space reminded me that the Museum has to find a less frustrating way to manage audiences and deal with the restrictions of limited ticket availability and seating.²⁰

The three curators of this year's Whitney Biennial ran a performance program on the ground floor of the museum, in the lobby gallery, which included Miguel Guitierrez, My Barbarian, and Taisha Paggett. While the program was not as integrated as in 2012, the gallery was an intimate, effective, well-proportioned space for showing performance. This was the last Biennial to be held in the building designed by Marcel Breuer; next year the Whitney moves to a new building by Renzo Piano in the Meatpacking District. This will include a 2,500-square-foot dedicated performance space: not a gray box, nor a circular tank, but a flexible space with a sprung floor, acoustic paneling, full lighting grid, projection booth, and retractable risers, enabling the space to be used both as an open loft or fixed proscenium seating. The far wall has large windows overlooking the Hudson, which can be covered by a diffusion curtain, a blackout curtain, or a cinema screen.

Conclusion

The three museums discussed in this article each have a distinct history: MoMA is anchored in modernist and postmodern dance, privileging work from the 1930s to the 1970s, and continues to validate contemporary dance above other forms of performance; its presentations make most sense when tied to exhibitions. But given its location and affluence, one might imagine MoMA undertaking collaborations with off-site organizations to co-produce works in contexts that provide a more conducive environment for dance. Its sister institution, MoMA PS1, has recently begun to show dance (Mårten Spångberg, Xavier le Roy) but the atmosphere around these productions is more rushed and last-minute; they come across as one more event amidst a slew of others. Tate's achievements lie primarily with its vital work of re-enactment and reconstruction, and with making these works freely accessible to the public within a festival format (notably the *Long Weekend* series); the downside to this approach is supersizing and mass audiences. The Whitney's history is tied to the Judson generation (and to their peers in music), but more recently

it has relied upon the Biennial as a way to frame this activity, rather than integrating dance and performance within exhibitions.²¹

Surveying these three examples, the problems and possibilities of dance in the museum can perhaps be boiled down to four points. The first is historical. The current love affair between museums and dance is in part an acknowledgment of the longevity of visual art's relationship to dance: from the historic avant-garde to Black Mountain College to post-punk. The reinsertion of dance into the museum acknowledges this long history, and allows it to be made visible again. At the same time, dance is rarely included in a fashion that allows it to become a historically significant presence; live dance is never presented as part of the collection displays, only in the form of film or video (e.g., Rainer's *Five Easy Pieces*, 1966–1969, amid the fourth floor Painting and Sculpture display at MoMA). Live dance seems to exist in a different time zone to that of history: it is usually deployed by the museum as presentist spectacle—a way to enliven its mausoleal atmosphere and play into the demands of an experience economy. Resolving the temporalities of these conflicting demands—i.e., finding a way to present dance as part of a historical dialogue with visual art, not just entertainment—is one of the main challenges the museum now faces.

At the same time, it is conspicuous that only *certain* lineages of dance are embraced by museums and the art world in general: a conceptually oriented practice that refuses narrative, character, and expressionism. As such it provides a perfect reinforcement for visual art's critique of theatricality, while offering an austere, pared-down beauty that also supplies a plenitude missing from so much contemporary visual art performance, with its preference for the authenticity of the unrehearsed. The dancer's body holds a knowledge that cannot be simulated, and thus satisfies a yearning for skill and seduction that visual art performance rejected in its inaugural refusals of spectacle and theater (refusals that, ironically, also characterized the first moments of postmodern dance in the 1960s). Could the current fascination for the performing arts be seen as signaling a retreat from performance art proper? Tania Bruguera has recently suggested that the performing artist (choreographer, theater director) knows how to collaborate with institutions, and is—in the majority of cases—a seasoned professional. The performance artist, by contrast, has a more antagonistic relationship to the museum, and frequently seeks disruption and intervention. Bruguera sees the turn to performing arts in the last decade as a conservative move, reducing risk and critique in favor of professional collaboration.²² The same could be said for the curatorial penchant for historical reconstruction: the known and tested is always a safer bet than the new and volatile.

The second possibility/problem of dance in the museum concerns audience and accessibility: the serendipitous advantages of making one's work available to a larger cross-section of the general public than a limited run at one of the city's smaller venues.²³ For dance, and increasingly theater, the museum promises exposure to new audiences—especially younger audiences for whom tickets otherwise remain prohibitively expensive. (Elevator Repair Service, who performed *Highway to Tomorrow* at the Philip Morris branch of the Whitney in 2000, are keen to find a model of working with museums exactly for this reason: by the time people are affluent enough to buy theater tickets, they are also less open-minded.) However, there is no such thing as a free lunch, and the cost of accessing a wider audience is precisely its transience and lack of attention: spectatorship is dispersed and fragmented when visitors can walk away from the work at any moment. Choreographers must be careful not to pander to short attention spans, or to feel aggrieved when viewers lose interest and meander off. Creating new works for gallery situations might be the best option, be this ticketed (e.g., Michelson's *Devotion Study #1*) or designed to structurally accommodate different levels of spectatorship in one multipart work (e.g., Xavier Le Roy's *Retrospective*, 2012).²⁴

The third factor, related to the second, is the pressure that the museum context places upon the integrity of a work. Museums can offer incredible opportunities for rethinking the context of choreography—formally and historically, but also socially and politically. When a work is made specifically for a site, this relocation can be immensely stimulating, especially if the choreographer

understands, and is responsive to, the mood and atmosphere of the building. The downside of this approach is that pieces originally conceived for the autonomy of a black-box theater might need serious reconsideration before being moved into white-cube institutions where context inevitably bleeds into the work—be this architecture, daylight, weather, acoustics, other works of art, viewers, or a larger curatorial framework. Cutting and editing a composition for presentation in the round can violate its meaning, and artists need to weigh carefully what can be gained from this migration and what is lost. Acoustics and lighting—some of the basic aesthetic ingredients of performance—are often considered disposable, but the more that dance takes place in museums, the more the construction of distinct atmospheres seems necessary.

The fourth consideration is financial. Unlike ticketed blockbuster exhibitions, performance is expensive, has no stable source of funding and does not recoup its costs. The Tanks—arguably the leading cross-disciplinary performance space in London since the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) entered a cash crisis in 2010—has the potential to be a regular partner on the European touring circuit, but the institution’s own funding for performance is so intermittent that this leap has yet to be made. In the meantime, its program is reliant on corporate sponsorship, which is by nature unreliable and comes with strings attached. At MoMA, director Glenn Lowry seems happy to pour funds into the Department of Performance and Media, but it can sometimes seem as if every Charmatz or Lemon needs its big-gun counterpart in the form of a pop star. The only downside of the Whitney’s new space is that it will be available only to U.S. artists, and that it separates performance from the galleries, returning us to the arts center model. All three institutions need to find a way to develop new funding models for dance—which may or may not complement the European grant-funding cycle—in order to more fully support home-grown talent.

We are now at a point where all three of the museums discussed have track records of presenting dance and performance within their exhibition spaces, but have also commissioned big-name “starchitects” to create expansions with dedicated spaces for this work. In the future, current debates about “dance in the museum” will probably seem like a brief blip that was finally resolved by the presentation of flexible, hybrid spaces both for visual art performances (where ideas of context and intervention remain key) and the performing arts (where acoustic and lighting conditions are finessed to maximize audience attention). With practical problems likely to be resolved in the near future, we can then turn to the question of how dance’s history might be presented as part of a museum’s collection, and not simply in the form of temporary events and exhibitions.²⁵ The question of *acquiring* dance, meanwhile, is deeply fraught, and arguably inimical to the discipline as a whole. The question that looms over the next decade is whether dance will continue to stand as an alternative economic model to the financial excesses of the art world, or whether it will be flattered into participating and competing with (and ultimately being colonized by) the hoarding impulse of museum logic.

Notes

Many thanks to Ana Janevski (Museum of Modern Art), Jay Sanders (Whitney Museum of American Art), and Catherine Wood (Tate) for their invaluable assistance with this article.

1. Other notable contemporary art spaces programming dance include the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, whose *Works and Process* series has presented dance in its Peter B. Lewis Theater since 1984, and the Dia Art Foundation, which hosted the Merce Cunningham Dance Company for a two-year residency at Dia:Beacon (2007–2009) and presented a series of dances by Yvonne Rainer and Steve Paxton, also at Dia:Beacon (2011–2012 and 2014, respectively). Shei Wen Dance Arts has performed at the North Carolina Museum of Art, the Collezione Maramotti in Italy, and most recently at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2012); Trisha Brown Dance Company has performed at Berlin’s Hamburger Bahnhof, the Museum of Contemporary

Art in Chicago, and the Getty and Hammer Museums in Los Angeles, and was in residence at the Walker Art Center in 1974, and returned there in 2008; Jonah Bokaer has made many pieces for museums since 2002, including IVAM (Valencia), Carré d'Art (Nimes), MUDAM (Luxembourg), the New Museum (NY), and the Fabric Workshop and Museum (Philadelphia); Benjamin Millepied has performed at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (LA MoCA).

2. In fact, Kirstein tried to get MoMA to be the original host/sponsor for the School of American Ballet. Barr declined, and Kirstein ended up running it largely independent of any institution. In 1940, the Walker Art Center began presenting local dance, poetry, and chamber music concerts.

3. Set design was shown in solo exhibitions by Joan Junyer (1945), Arch Lauterer (1946), and Robert Edmond Jones (*World of Illusion: Elements of Stage Design*, 1947–1948).

4. I am sure the dance crowd will beg to differ here, but from a visual art perspective, the similarity of dance performances in gallery spaces is increasingly troublesome. This becomes especially clear when looking at photo and video documentation of these events. Sehgal is wise to forbid photography of his work, as it flattens our memory of the encounter. I should add that during *Three Collective Gestures*, curated by Ana Janevski, Charmatz performed two other pieces in the atrium: *Levée des Conflits* (2010) and *Flip Book/50 Years of Dance* (2009), for which a white sprung floor and special lighting were installed.

5. See for example, Jerry Saltz (2014a), “The New MoMA Expansion Is a Mess”; Jerry Saltz (2014b), “Jerry Saltz to MoMA’s Trustees: Please, Reject This Awful Expansion Plan.”

6. Tate seems not to have had any performance during the 1960s or 1970s, and only intermittently during the 1980s. Notable exceptions are the performances included in *Seven Exhibitions: Keith Arnatt, Michael Craig-Martin, Bob Law, Joseph Beuys, Hamish Fulton, Bruce McLean, David Tremlett* (1972) and Tate’s “first season of Performance Art” in 1981, as part of *Performance, Installations, Video, Film*. Dominated by installation and video screenings, the latter series included live performances in the galleries by Marc-Camille Chaimowicz and Charlie Hooker. In 1985, a small performance series accompanied the exhibition *Pound’s Artists: Ezra Pound and the Visual Arts in London, Paris and Italy*, featuring live works in the galleries by Rose English, Silvia Ziraneck, Hannah O’Shea, and Nan Hoover. In 1989, a Performance Sub-Committee was established to promote performance, understood as “any ‘live’ activity . . . performance art, dance, drama, readings and music,” the latter building upon the museum’s successful series of classical music concerts in the Clore Galleries (Performance Sub-Committee 1989, 1).

7. Poots would go on to bring high-end performers to the Manchester International Festival and the Park Avenue Armory.

8. Conversation with the author, spring 2014.

9. *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* was subsequently reperformed at the Walker Art Center in 2008, by Stephen Petronio at the Whitney Museum in 2010 as part of the exhibition *Off the Wall*, and by Amelia Rudolph at the Center for the Art of Performance at UCLA in 2013. Of these, the performance by Petronio (a former member of Brown’s company) seems best to achieve the strength of the original.

10. This work has since become an interactive installation without dancers, *Nowhere and Everywhere at the Same Time No.2*, described by the company as a “choreographic object” with 400 pendulums (Forsythe 2013). It was first shown at the Ruhrtriennial in 2013.

11. Clark returned to Tate Modern in June 2011 to present the premiere of *th*, a work devised for the Turbine Hall space; this time the performances were ticketed.

12. LACMA in particular had a strong performance program in the mid-1960s. One concert in April 1966 included Rauschenberg’s *Pelican* (1963), Paxton’s *Earth Interior* (1966), Alex Hay’s *Rio Grande* (1964), and Hay’s *Serious Duet* (1966), with the performers comprising a who’s who of New York dance and visual art performance. In 1969, a 25-year-old Meredith Monk showed the first part of *Juice: A Theater Cantata in Three Installments* at the Guggenheim Museum, taking over the entire space (ramps, galleries, stairwells) with 85 performers; the remaining two installments were shown at the Minor Latham Playhouse, Barnard College, and the House Loft.

13. 911 comprised two premieres—*20 Permutations of 2 Sets of 3 Equal Parts in Linear Pattern and Half Time*—plus *26 Variations on 8 Activities for 13 People Plus Beginning and Ending*, which had recently been performed by Yvonne Rainer at the Billy Rose Theatre. The first performance, for Friends of the Whitney, was followed by a closed panel discussion with Hay, Rainer, and curators Marcia Tucker and James Monte, which was moderated by art critic Douglas Davis.

14. In 1970, Weil noted that “a growing number of artists are offering their services for future performances at the Museum” (8).

15. The work was first shown as *Loops*, presented at MoMA in front of Jasper Johns’s painting *Map, after Buckminster Fuller’s Dymaxian Airocean World*, in the Founders’ Room on the sixth floor (December 1971).

16. Bromner (1982) maintains that this was the first program of avant-garde dance to be shown at a U.S. museum since MoMA’s 1978 Summergarden concert series *Post-Modern Dance*. The series was cancelled when one of the dancers was seen naked during a costume change, causing the Whitney’s permit for the building to be revoked by the U.S. Department of the Interior; the remainder of the program took place at the Kitchen.

17. In 1981, there were performances by Dance Elements, Allegra Dance Theatre, Cyndi Lee, and Geri Atwood at Champion, while at Philip Morris, there was Mel Wong Dance Company (1984), Wendy Perron Dance Company (1987), Alice Farley and Company (1988), Ishmael Houston-Jones (1988), and Merce Cunningham (1995).

18. Jack Anderson’s (1984) review of Childs’s program in *The New York Times* complained about bad sightlines in the gallery: “Rows of cushions and folding chairs surrounded a little platform on three sides. The floor was flat, no seats were raised and sightlines were virtually nonexistent. The Whitney may be a good space for concerts. But it does not appear to be any space at all for dancing.”

19. *4 Evenings in 4 Days* also included a mini festival within a festival by Jean Dupuy.

20. In short: viewers have to collect pre-paid tickets at least an hour before the performance, and to stand in line for the rest of this hour before being allowed up in the elevator to the fourth floor. Once the doors open, it’s like *The Hunger Games* as everyone sprints and scrambles for a good seat.

21. The restrictions of being a museum dedicated only to American art become apparent here, as seen in the recent exhibition *Rituals of Rented Island: Object Theater, Loft Performance, and the New Psychodrama—Manhattan, 1970–1980* (2013).

22. Tania Bruguera, in conversation with the author, April 2014.

23. The ability to reach wider audiences has also been one reason for documentary filmmakers turning to visual art since the 1990s. See Farocki (2008).

24. “Retrospective” by Xavier Le Roy was held at the Tapiès Foundation in Barcelona in 2012, and has since toured the Deichtorhallen, Hamburg; Musée de la Danse, Rennes; Museu de Arte de Rio, Rio de Janeiro; Centre Pompidou, Paris; and MoMA PS1, New York.

25. Recent examples include *Dance with Camera* (ICA Philadelphia, 2009), *Move: Choreographing You* (Hayward Gallery, 2010), *Dance/Draw* (ICA Boston, 2011), or *Danser sa vie* (Centre Pompidou, 2011–2012).

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