

“EVERY MOVEMENT COUNTS:” CURATING DANCE AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN
ART

by

HILARY SKYE SCHROEDER

(Under the Direction of Isabelle Loring Wallace and Nell Andrew)

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines a series of exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, New York that took the medium of dance as a primary focus. Through a series of case studies, this study considers the historical failure to integrate the medium into the museum at large, despite efforts to do so in the 1940s. Turning to the present day, this thesis explores the Museum’s concerted effort since 2009 to reconsider the contributions that dance makes to both historical understandings of art history and present-day museological interventions. Two exhibitions, *On Line: Drawing through the Twentieth Century* (2011) and *Some Sweet Day* (2012), offer potential methods for making MoMA a dancing museum and, as this thesis argues, set the stage for a bloom of scholarship and still more radical programming, which work together to question and remake the relationship between the medium of dance and the museum institution.

INDEX WORDS: Dance, Contemporary Art, Dance and the Museum, Dance and Art, The Museum of Modern Art, MoMA, Choreography, Ralph Lemon, Xavier Le Roy, Boris Charmatz, *Some sweet day* (2012), *Another Modern Art* (2009), *On Line: Drawing through the Twentieth Century* (2011)

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HILARY SKYE SCHROEDER

Major Professor: Isabelle Loring Wallace
Committee: Nell Andrew
Katie Geha

Electronic Version Approved:

Julie Coffield
Interim Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2015

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the creative heartbeat of Athens, a town that early on captured my heart and whose spirit I'll carry always.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
CHAPTER	
1 I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. ANOTHER MODERN ART	4
III. ON LINE.....	10
IV. SOME SWEET DAY	22
V. A DANCING MUSEUM.....	34
REFERENCES	39

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1: Flyer for “An Evening on American Dance,” c. January 1948.....	42
Figure 2: Alfred H. Barr, Diagram for <i>Cubism and Abstract Art</i> , 1939.....	43
Figure 3: Leah Dickerman’s 2012 web for <i>Inventing Abstraction</i>	44
Figure 4: Trisha Brown Company, <i>Sticks</i> , 1973. Performed at MoMA, 2011.....	45
Figure 5: Floor Plan of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, N.Y.	46
Figure 6: Trisha Brown Company, <i>Roof Piece Re-Layed</i> , 2011. Performed at MoMA, 2011.....	47
Figure 7: Ralph Lemon, <i>Untitled</i> , 2008. Performed at MoMA, 2011.....	48
Figure 8: Xavier Le Roy, <i>Self Unfinished</i> , 1998. Performed at MoMA, 2011.....	49
Figure 9: Kevin Beasely, <i>I Want My Spot Back</i> , 2011. Performed at MoMA, 2012.....	50
Figure 10: Sarah Michelson, <i>Devotion Study #3</i> , 2012. Performed at MoMA, 2012.....	51
Figure 11: Jérôme Bel, <i>The Show Must Go On</i> , 2001. Performed at MoMA, 2012.....	52
Figure 12: Steve Paxton, <i>Satisfying Lover</i> , 1967. Performed at MoMA, 2012.....	53
Figure 13: Steve Paxton, <i>State</i> , 1968. Performed at MoMA, 2012.....	54
Figure 14: Boris Charmatz, <i>Flip Book</i> , 2008. Performed at MoMA, 2013.....	55

CHAPTER 1

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1939, Lincoln Kirstein, an art connoisseur and co-founder and director of the New York City Ballet, established the short-lived Dance Archives at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).¹ Just eight years later, on January 9, 1947, a memorandum to museum director René d'Harnoncourt from the Archive curator, George Amberg referred to the closure of the Dance Archives and its accompanying department: "It is fairly evident that the Department [of Theatre Arts] has suffered not so much from lack of funds or adequate staff as from lack of clear realization of its function within the Museum structure."² Indeed, the closure marked the beginning of a sixty-year period during which MoMA dealt only marginally with the medium of dance. In fact, the 1984 publication, *The Museum of Modern Art, New York: The History and the Collection*, details an extensive history of the institution, yet hardly mentions the existence of the Dance Archive and the department of Dance and Theater Design.³ This official museum publication underscores how dance had been written out of the institution's history. However, with the establishment of the Performance Program in 2009 and the growth of MoMA's sister

¹ The Dance Archives would eventually become the curatorial department of Dance and Theater Design in 1944; I would like to acknowledge here the source of the phrase "Every Movement Counts" in my title. It comes from Sondra Horton Fraleigh's discussion of the value of every type of movement made in dance, which I extend in this paper to include the choices regarding the presentation of dance at the Museum of Modern Art. See Sondra Horton Fraleigh, *Dance and the Lived Body: A Descriptive Aesthetics* (Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987), 88.

² George Amberg to René d'Harnoncourt, December 3, 1947 and January 9, 1947 [Dance Archives I.7], Museum of Modern Art Art Archives, New York, N.Y.

³ Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.), and Sam Hunter, *The Museum of Modern Art, New York: The History and the Collection* (New York, N.Y.: H.N. Abrams in association with the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984).

institution PS1, MoMA has made a concerted effort to bring dance back to the museum. Why and to what end did dance return to the Museum of Modern Art? As I will argue in the course of this thesis, the inclusion of dance, and in particular its live performance, in the structure of the museum is a significant development – one that raises important questions about dance, art, and the kinds of institutions that are devoted to their preservation and display.

In addressing these issues, my thesis participates in a larger scholarly trend. The study of dance and art beyond the minimalist work of the Judson Dance Theater in the 1960s has seen a renaissance in recent years, as scholars respond to various exhibitions, including an exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in London entitled *MOVE: Choreographing You* (October 13, 2010-January 9, 2011).⁴ The catalogue published in conjunction with this particular exhibition contains essays by prominent scholars like Peggy Phelan and André Lepecki, and is one of an increasing number of resources directly dealing with art and dance performance. Scholarly interest in the topic is clearly on the rise, as indicated by the December 2014 special issue of *Dance Research Journal*, *Dance in the Museums* and a panel devoted to the same topic at the 2015 College Art Association meeting.⁵ The *Dance Research Journal* articles are heavily skewed towards analysis of work by French choreographer Boris Charmatz who became director of the Centre chorégraphique national de rennes et de Bretagne and renamed it, provocatively, the *Musée de la Danse*. The Musée de la Danse is not a physical museum but rather a concept evocative of new approach to a dance institution. However, many of the contributors to the *Dance Research Journal* special issue still take up (or at least identify) overarching issues presented by the intersection of dance and the traditional art museum such as MoMA: the ephemerality of dance

⁴ Stephanie Rosenthal, Susan Leigh Foster, André Lepecki, and Peggy Phelan, *Move: Choreographing You* (London: Hayward Pub.), 2010.

⁵Mark Franko and André Lepecki, *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 3 (December 2014); The 2015 panel at the College Art Association was entitled “Dance and the Art Museum,” organized by Jennie Goldstein and Amanda Jane Graham.

and performance more generally; the marginal status of dance; the formalist narrative with which MoMA is aligned; the practical needs of using live performers; and the very layout of MoMA.⁶ Unlike works of art, performers require compensation for their time, and the economy of performance becomes complicated when designated seats are not sold for a performance. Furthermore, live performance cannot participate in a typical art market, as it leaves behind only traces in the form of photographs, costumes, and other ephemera. Though the best solution has yet to be found, museums and scholars alike are searching for alternative methods of preservation. And, as the case studies in this thesis will bear out, the museum setting, although not a “stage,” is still a frame within which choreographers must reconcile or rebel against various limitations and implications. With an eye to these issues, this thesis builds on extant literature for the purpose of considering the implications of dance’s resurgence at MoMA, a large, well-known institution associated with formalist art history, the canonization of modernism, and standard-setting exhibitions.

Though the Performance Program itself can certainly be seen as an extended curatorial effort, I am more interested here in individual curatorial projects within the Program that bring works of dance together in an exhibition-like format and attempt to address the issues stated above.⁷ In particular, this study begins by establishing the history of dance at MoMA and the associated complications it raises through the lens of *Another Modern Art: Dance and Theater* (June 24-August 24, 2009). *Another Modern Art* examined the short-lived Dance Archives

⁶ Alessandra Nicifero, "OCCUPY MoMA: The (Risks and) Potentials of a Musée de la danse!." *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 3 (December 2014): 32-44.

⁷ Claire Bishop "The Perils and Possibilities of Dance in the Museum: Tate, MoMA, and Whitney." *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 3 (December 2014): 72. At the end of her article on dance and the museums, Bishop lays out four major problems for the subject at hand: historical biases in the kinds of dance shown; audience and accessibility; concern for the integrity of the work; and financial issues. I will be focusing primarily on historical biases, but regardless of this focus, the other three problems with inevitably show through.

coincided with the start of Performance Program at MoMA in 2009, and helped to mark the return of the medium to the museum. I also look at *Inventing Abstraction, 1910-1925* (December 23, 2012-April 15, 2013) as an opportunity to rethink MoMA's foundational attitudes surrounding modernism in 1936. From this early history and the two recent exhibitions that contend with MoMA's early history either directly or conceptually, I will move forward to a series of exhibitions incorporating dance after 2009. I take two exhibitions in particular as case studies: *On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century* (November 10, 2010-February 11, 2011 with performances occurring January 12 through February 6, 2011), which sought to integrate dance into broader visual concepts in the plastic arts; and *Some sweet day* (October 15-November 4, 2012), an exhibition comprised entirely of live performance and meant to interrogate the relationship between dance and the museum. Through an examination of MoMA's programming between 2009 and 2013, the treatment of dance in the context of more traditional object-centric exhibitions, and MoMA's engagement with the ephemeral, phenomenological medium of dance as an object in and of itself, this thesis reveals the contiguity of dance as part of art historical discourse, the challenges presented in its integration, and its potential to radicalize the art-historical museum.

II. ANOTHER MODERN ART

It is not, after all, by chance that the era of modernism coincides with the era of the museum.

– Douglas Crimp⁸

In order to think critically about the present and the recent reemergence of dance at MoMA, we must first consider the past that has shaped it. As noted, the official history of dance at MoMA begins in 1939 with Lincoln Kirstein's establishment of the Dance Archives. The

⁸ Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October* Vol. 8 (Spring 1979): 88.

Dance Archives consisted of prints, photographs, slides, films, and books, and was housed in the museum's library.⁹ From 1940 to 1946, the Dance Archives hosted a handful of exhibitions related to dance, its production, its aesthetics, and its ephemera, encouraging dialogue around its value in modern visual culture.¹⁰ However, as noted, the Dance Archive and the department of Dance and Theater Design were short lived; the dance-related documentation moved to Harvard University in 1946 and the department as a whole dissolved in 1948. Before this final dissolution, MoMA hosted *An Evening on American Dance*, comprised of live performances by seven dancer/choreographers, including modern dance giant, José Limon (fig. 1). This “celebration” of dance marking the Archive's closure was set in the museum's auditorium, presenting dance as more than just its ephemera, if not as an object proper in and of itself. Yet, with the exception of exhibitions like *Performance* in 1983 and *In Honor of Merce Cunningham* in 1994, live art and its makers fell out of focus at MoMA until 2008 with the addition of “Performance Art” to the Department of Media.

In January 2009, the first official work in the Performance Program, *Performance 1: Tehching Hsieh* (January 21-May 18, 2009), was held as part of the museum's renewed commitment to “bring performance documentation, original performance pieces, and live reenactments of historic performances” to MoMA.¹¹ A few months later, another exhibition recovered Kirstein's dream of performance as part of the museum at large. *Another Modern Art: Dance and Theater* (June 24-August 24, 2009) highlighted the history of the Dance Archives,

⁹ “Dance Archives in The Museum of Modern Art,” prepared in 1990 and updated in 2006, Museum of Modern Art, New York, N.Y., <http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/archives/EAD/DanceArchivesf>.

¹⁰ Exhibitions included *Forty Years of American Dance* (1941), *Isadora Duncan: Drawings, Photographs, Memorabilia* (1941-1942), and *Modern American Dance* (1945).

¹¹ “Performance 1: Tehching Hsieh,” Museum of Modern Art, New York, N.Y., <http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/322>. This description comes from the publicity material for the first performance in the series.

and materials from the archive and related documents were exhibited in the mezzanine of MoMA's Lewis B. and Dorothy Cullman Education and Research Building.

The exhibition presented the 1940s as a period of directed interest in dance within a narrative dominated by photography, film, sculpture, drawing, and painting. In her description and analysis of the Archive materials, museum archivist and exhibition organizer Michelle Elligott notes that a 1948 press release stated that the closure of the Archives and the Department of Theatre Arts resulted from rising operating costs. However, she counters this with the quotation from George Amberg to museum director René d'Harnoncourt that opens this paper. Amberg's statement offers a potential explanation for why MoMA rarely dealt with dance between 1949 and 2009; as he diplomatically put it in his letter: the "Department (of Theatre Arts) has suffered not so much from lack of funds ... as from lack of clear realization of its function within the Museum structure." In the same memorandum, Amberg made the case to the director that "in the overall presentation of contemporary arts within the Museum, [the department] proves the capacity to function on the same level of significance and achievement as the Museum's other departments."¹² But there is little doubt that the issue of medium was indeed at the core of the department and archive's closure. Because of the medium's ephemeral nature, lack of objects, and seeming disconnect from the art of the period, museum officials failed to understand dance's potential integration into the mission of MoMA at the time.¹³

As noted, *Another Modern Art* signaled the end of MoMA's marginalization of dance and the start of its renewed focus on the medium in programming and curatorial practices. By

¹² George Amberg to René d'Harnoncourt, December 3, 1947 and January 9, 1947 [Dance Archives I.7], Museum of Modern Art Art Archives, New York, N.Y.

¹³ The Dance Archives benefitted from Kirstein's efforts during the 1940s to found the New York City Ballet and his close relationship with the Museum of Modern Art, which included writing essays for early photography exhibition catalogues. However, Kirstein, with his many ventures outside the museum, could not single handedly run the Archives and Department of Theatre Arts, contributing to their unsuccessful integration into the museum structure.

exhibiting materials from the Dance Archive in 2009, Elligott highlighted a period in MoMA's long history in which dance and its ephemera were believed by some to have the potential to contribute to a larger understanding of Modernism, indicated by the second part of Amberg's memorandum. Though Amberg believed dance could support the formalist goals of the museum, the upper administration in place at MoMA viewed dance as incompatible with the Modernist reliance on the object. Although located in the Education and Research building, *Another Modern Art* was one of MoMA's first intentional examinations of dance since the 1940s and a harbinger of change, denoting a shift in MoMA's mission carried out in the Performance Program. The title of Elligott's exhibition proclaims a part of history ignored by MoMA for nearly sixty years, working to expand the scope and depth of the museum's holdings and even the concept of modern art itself. For Elligott in 2009 and Kirstein and Amberg in the 1940s, dance and theater were undeniably *another kind of modern art*, to be considered alongside the paintings and sculptures on display in MoMA's galleries. As their exhibition proposed, dance offered a kinesthetic form of communication not bound by spoken or written language, allowing it to embody ideas of modernism and abstraction that visual artists at times struggled to actualize in their art.

Tied to the early history of dance at MoMA is the institution's foundational goal of being an arbiter of modern and contemporary art defined by a strong historical commitment to formalism. This is illustrated early in the museum's history in Alfred H. Barr Jr.'s 1936 diagram of Cubism and Abstract Art (fig. 2), produced for a 1936 exhibition of the same name. Barr's diagram bears out the concept of a teleological development of modern art, already at work in

1936 and cemented by Clement Greenberg in the 1960s.¹⁴ In art-historical terms, the teleology reflects the belief in a self-determined and medium specific progression of the plastic arts of painting and sculpture that drove Western art history through the 1960s until the emergence of postmodernism. The failure of the Dance Archives indicates that even in its early years, when MoMA opened some of the first departments specializing in photography and cinema, the museum struggled to incorporate the ephemeral, fleeting, and body-based medium of dance into the medium-centric history of modern art. Barr's diagram, an artifact of the museum's early years, reflects MoMA's titular devotion to modern art and assumptions about its development. The diagram evidences the foundational ideas about Modernism at play in MoMA's collecting and curatorial habits, laying out the history as both linear and medium-specific. Because of its clear influence on MoMA's self-conception, Barr's illustration of Modernist connections in 1936 has prompted both new ideas and criticism in the contemporary period, reflected in scholarly texts and exhibitions.

The 2012 exhibition *Inventing Abstraction: 1910-1925*, curated by Leah Dickerman, curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture, reenvisioned MoMA's 1936 *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition. Dickerman, in an attempt to rethink teleological conceptions of art history, altered Barr's 1936 diagram to form a geographic web connecting people rather than movements in the interest of highlighting Modernism's international and multi-media qualities (fig. 3). Amongst the many recognizable names of Modernism like Pablo Picasso, Tristan Tzara, and Vasily Kandinsky were three dancers: Vaslav Nijinsky, Rudolf von Laban, and Mary Wigman. Perhaps symptomatic of the contemporaneous, bustling performance program at MoMA, Dickerman's inclusion of Nijinsky, Laban, and Wigman seems potentially radical. Art

¹⁴ Clement Greenberg's first major essay, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" was published in the journal *Partisan Review* in 1939, just three years after the 1936 MoMA show. This work established many of his main ideas on Modernism that became fully solidified in his seminal text "Modernist Painting" in 1960.

historians Nell Andrew and Juliet Bellow tackle Dickerman's attempts at integrating dance into the story of modernism in their chapter "Inventing Abstraction? Modernist Dance in Europe" from Allana Lindgren and Stephen Ross' forthcoming compendium *The Modernist World*.¹⁵ Andrew and Bellow question whether or not the inclusion of dance in the reinstatement of MoMA's Modernist, teleological art history truly marks a drastic shift in the museum's conception of dance. As they argue, the exhibition ultimately reduced dance to drawings, photographs, and films – objects and images rather than well-communicated presentations of the body as a site for modernist ideations.¹⁶ As represented within the exhibition, dance, they argue, felt tangential rather than essential (as it certainly was) to the development of modernist ideas and aesthetics.¹⁷

Inventing Abstracting still struggled to integrate dance into the medium-specific driven history of Modernism, echoing MoMA's troubles with the Dance Archives in the 1940s. The advent of the Department of Media and Performance Art, however, presented the Performance Program as a venue through which alternative methods for integrating dance at MoMA might be explored. As *On Line* and *Some sweet day* will demonstrate, thoughtful curation that crosses medium specific boundaries contributes new ideas and alternative models for the histories of art and dance.

¹⁵ Nell Andrew and Juliet Bellow, "Inventing Abstraction? Modernist Dance in Europe." in *The Modernist World*, ed. Allana Lindgren and Stephen Ross, 329-338. London: Routledge, 2015.

¹⁶ While the reinstatement failed overall in fully integrating dance, one area success of may be found in the performance *Fabian Barba: A Mary Wigman Dance Evening*. Part of the Performance Program's *Performing Histories: Live Artworks Examining the Past* (2012-2013), Barba's performance allowed museum goers to see nine works by Wigman reconstructed and performed live in the galleries.

¹⁷ Andrew and Bellow 329-331. Both Andrew and Bellow are amongst a growing number of modernist scholars working at the intersection of art history and other forms of media like dance, music, and theater to present a more complete and interdisciplinary vision of the Modern period. The book chapter referenced here does much to integrate dance into this trajectory, looking at how the abstract language of dance radically affected and defined twentieth-century modernism.

III. ON LINE

What struck me that afternoon in MoMA is that paintings, however complicated they are, and many of them are very complicated, always imagine some version of autonomy, either in their making, their viewing, or in their mere existence, while dance always requires an other; it begins with the notion that there is no such thing as autonomy.

-Helen Molesworth¹⁸

In its second year, the Performance Program became a venue through which to incorporate performance (and dance, more specifically) into MoMA's exhibition of art historical objects. *On Line: Drawing in the Twentieth Century*, curated by Cornelia Butler and Catherine de Zegher, offered one potential solution for integrating performance into a larger exhibition context. In one of MoMA's first attempts at combining dance and visual works in a single exhibition, the museum used points of commonality between dance and art as a way of making dance more accessible to the museum's visitors and better connected to its form and image-based focus. One goal for *On Line* was the integration of dance into the story of art told at MoMA, historicizing certain aspects of it along the way. The title most obviously suggests the act of drawing, but when considering the addition of dance to the exhibition, "On Line" further implies an acknowledgement of the physical and formal ability of the body to create linearity and the concurrent development of multiple mediums on line with one another in the Twentieth Century. Claire Bishop argues that dance tied to an exhibition of objects is the easiest method for bringing dance into the museum setting, but at the cost of reducing dance to spectacle, meant only to enliven the "mausoleal" space of the museum and partake in an economy dependent on drawing in spectators.¹⁹ However, I argue that through their thoughtful inclusion of choreographers both

¹⁸ Helen Anne Molesworth, "A Conversation between Paul Chan and Helen Molesworth" in *Dance/Draw*, ed. Helen Anne Molesworth (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 36. Molesworth speaks here about her experiencing the evening of performances by the Trisha Brown Company as a part of *On Line*.

¹⁹ Bishop, 72.

from within and outside of art history, the curators of *On Line* offer examples of how the kinesthetic and experiential medium of dance can both fit into art historical discourses and open up potential lines of inquiry into larger problems associated with the medium of dance.

In a video interview, Butler states that "It was always [my and de Zegher's] intention that we would stage some performance, action, or dance works in conjunction with the exhibition," denoting how performance was conceived as integral to expressing the major concepts of the exhibition.²⁰ Though the exhibition takes the practice of drawing as its primary focus, the curators establish broad definitions of drawing and creation as tangible acts at the core of their curatorial goals. De Zegher opens the catalogue's first essay by calling drawings "a kinesthetic practice of traction," immediately setting the tone for drawing as anything but static, two dimensional, optical, or purely visual.²¹ As part of the exhibition, *On Line* included five performances of dance in MoMA's galleries in order to bring attention to the intimate relationship between performed and plastic expressions of line. Butler calls the "meandering yet persistent" formal dialogue between the mediums of dance and drawing over the past century one of "movement aspiring to be art," boldly naming the present moment one where drawing is an act rather than merely an object and the moving body and visual art are equals.²²

²⁰"Performance 12: *On Line*/Marie Cool and Fabio Balducci Jan 17-20, 2011," video from the Museum of Modern Art, New York, N.Y., 4:02, 2011, <http://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/videos/136/903>; Butler discusses Rainier's *Trio A* (1966), tying the piece's use of lateral movement in relation to the architectural space it was performed in as a kind of drawing of the body through space (Butler, 176). *Trio A* was in fact the third performance chosen for MoMA's newly inaugurated Performance series in 2009. Performed in the museum's Special Exhibitions Gallery, it included a projection of Sally Banes' 1978 film of *Trio A* behind three live performers. The work integrated well into Butler's discussion of line because of its recent exhibition as a live work, uniting the practice of performance with practice of curation and exhibition at MoMA.

²¹ Catherine De Zegher, "A Century under the Sign of Line: Drawing and Its Extension (1910-2010)" in *On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century*, Cornelia H. Butler and M. Catherine de Zegher (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 23.

²² Cornelia Bulter, "Walkaround Rime: Drawing and Dance in the Twentieth Century" in *On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century*, Cornelia H. Butler and M. Catherine de Zegher (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 139.

The performances scheduled as part of *On Line* included an evening of four pieces by the Trisha Brown Dance Company, a series of works by Marie Cool and Fabio Balducci, *Violin Phase* from *Fase: Four movements to the Music of Steve Reich* (1982) performed by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, an untitled work from 2008 by Ralph Lemon, and *Self Unfinished* (1998) by Xavier Le Roy. The choices cover a range of established postmodern dancers and canonical works, like Brown and De Keersmaeker, as well as more recent explorations of dance from voices like Lemon and Le Roy. By linking dance intimately with the visual concepts of drawing presented in the exhibition, *On Line* made the case for the power and validity of dance in a museum setting, chiefly for communicating ideas associated with the history of art. In the interest of space, I will be limiting my discussion to the performances by Brown, Lemon, and Le Roy.

The *On Line* performances opened with a program of four works by Trisha Brown from the 1970s: *Sticks* (1973), *Scallops* (1973), *Locus Solo* (1975) and *Roof Piece Re-Layed* (2001) (based on *Roof Piece* [1971]). I will be focusing on *Sticks* and *Roof Piece Re-Layed*. Because of Brown's association with the Judson Dance Theater and Minimalism, her work already receives attention in the discipline of art history, which in turn makes her choreography a safe and logical choice for both MoMA and *On Line*. The formal nature of Brown's oeuvre concerns itself with issues of line, spatial relationships, minimalism, and form, sharing both visual languages and intentions with High Modernism. The works have strong formal qualities that highlight the relationship between structure and the dancing body.²³ *Sticks* presented four dancers, dressed in white, who danced with ten foot poles that balanced between their heads and the junction where

²³ "Behind the Scenes: *Performance 11: On Line/Trisha Brown Dance Company*," video from the Museum of Modern Art, New York, N.Y., 2:33, 2011, <http://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/videos/136/829>; Diane Madden, rehearsal director for the Trisha Brown Dance Company, discusses in a video interview how Brown's early work fits well with the themes of the exhibition, acknowledging the logical inclusion of Brown in *On Line*.

the floor and met the Plexiglas railing of the Marron Atrium, overlooking the museum's first floor. They rotated underneath the poles and lower to floor in perfect unison, and their exceptional balance of the pole and the slow, simple movement of the choreography prioritized the experience of linearity, the plum line of the body, and the repetition of form. In the museum setting, this piece reminded viewers of visual balance, harmony, and symmetry – qualities that many works of art on the walls of MoMA subscribe to or defy. Over the shoulders of the dancers and the mezzanine railing was James Rosenquist's *Lady Dog Lizard* (1985), for example, a large colorful painting exploding with firework-like forms. It contrasted with the dancers' stark costumes and movement while museum visitors milled about the floor below, seemingly unaware of the quiet, unaccompanied movement occurring just above them (fig. 4). As this particular performance made clear, even when imperceptible, dance is never autonomous from the spaces around it. The poles in *Sticks* mapped the relation of the dancers to the spatial limits and potentials around them, reiterating the body's extension both literally and conceptually into the environment surrounding it. For, while a painting might hang placidly and isolated on a wall, dance's formal affinities include not just the performing body but the very architectural and decorative elements around it, inherently and always site specific.

Before moving to the second work by Brown under consideration here, the site of the Marron Atrium bears some analysis as a venue. Situated on the second floor of MoMA, the atrium serves as the access point to the first level of galleries, including the contemporary collection and some special exhibition galleries (fig. 5). The third and fourth floors include balconies and large windows in the gallery walls that overlook the atrium below. Only the fifth floor, reserved exclusively for special exhibitions, offers no view down to the Marron Atrium. Designed by Yoshio Taniguchi, the atrium was conceived of as a space for large-scale sculptural

installation, performances, and other events outside the typical fare of MoMA's regular galleries. In a 2010 New York Times article, critic Roberta Smith called the flurry of activity in the atrium a "sign of the museum's giddy, even desperate, embrace of the new and the next, of large-scale installation and video art, as well as performance art, and generally of art as entertainment and spectacle."²⁴ Neither overtly critical nor praise-filled, Smith's assessment of the Marron Atrium is indicative of the ambiguity that plagues the space and the happenings within it. The atrium is not a true gallery, per se, but a liminal and interstitial site that interrupts visitors on their way to the galleries. Despite its central location in the museum, the Marron Atrium hosts decentralizing works, making it a provocative and yet still peripheral site for dance.

The possibility for dance outside the stage of the Marron Atrium was explored most fully in the final piece of the Trisha Brown program, the restaging of Brown's 1971 *Roof Piece*. The new name given to the work, *Roof Piece Re-Layed*, indicates the topographic shifts in the construction of the piece necessitated by its new site in the museum. Originally, the piece took place in a line across rooftops in SoHo, with movement passing from dancer to dancer in a linear fashion, taking the lines of the human form and extending them again in a line across the cityscape. For *On Line*, the dancers spiraled up through the floors of the museum, with performers standing behind the large floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the atrium from the galleries (fig. 6). The distance between dancers offered a multiplicity of viewings, though not all were satisfying in the sense of traditional expectations for staged dance. When standing in the atrium, one might have looked up and seen the transference of movement from one dancer to the next on the floor above, following the flow of form through the museum's architecture. One might also have been confronted by the body of the dancer standing before a window when

²⁴ Roberta Smith, "Hold that Obit: MoMA's Not Dead," *The New York Times*, December 30, 2010, www.nytimes.com/2011/01/02/arts/design/02moma.html.

visiting the different galleries, expecting to find a Pablo Picasso painting or a Robert Rauschenberg construction but instead finding a living, breathing body. The nature of the gallery space and the architectural flow of museums cordoned off *Roof Piece*'s dancers from one another and from other parts of the museum. Both experiences denied a total image of the work, for in the atrium, one could not watch every point on the spiral all at once, while the confrontation in the gallery denied a view out into the rest of the museum and the other windows in which the performers stood. *Roof Piece*, in both iterations, makes fragmentary viewing its subject, moving the work outside the theatrical stage and into sites that counter the controlled and complete view of traditional concert dance. A museum visitor may stumble upon the performance in the gallery, entering in the middle of the choreography rather than sitting down in a theater seat to watch a piece from start to finish.

The linear quality and clear interest in form within Brown's work aligns with *On Line*'s exploration of drawing while also raising questions about the experience of the museum's structure and its content's arrangement within that structure. The placement of Brown's choreography over the course of the evening adheres to the architectural flow of the museum's design, wherein one must traverse the galleries of the museum in order to come across these formal moments and view the different pieces in the program. By taking place throughout the museum, the choreography operates differently than it would on a stage or as a work of concert dance. The dance is fragmented when spread across a specific site, and the time-based experience of moving through the galleries to see Brown's work mirrors the temporality of the medium. Indeed, an analogy between the museum, when activated by performance, and the stage is established wherein both real and represented bodies "perform." Art historian Marcella Lista outlines the "unbridgeable dichotomy" between theatrical and gallery spectatorship as one of

dance in the museum's obvious problems, yet the gap between these two ways of viewing offers a site in which to question the value and permanence of such systems.²⁵

Brown's work easy integration into both the exhibition and the museum itself nonetheless exposes pieces from the Judson Dance Theater era as relatively safe choices, since the Judson period is one of the only periods in which dance has been theoretically integrated into art history.²⁶ In the 1960s, the Judson Dance Theater benefitted from close association and collaboration with artists like Robert Morris and Robert Rauschenberg. The work of Judson also had fluidity within gallery spaces, integrating into the visual art world. This tradition has carried over to the present, as Brown's work has been shown many times in a museum setting, and perhaps due to a strong choreographic archive, her works can easily be restaged with new bodies in new spaces.²⁷ The minimalist aesthetic of Judson choreography, though often pedestrian in its appearance, is usually controlled, precise, and accessible. Because of its associations with Minimalism, Brown's work is placed on a theoretical pedestal in the galleries, elevated to the status of a work of visual art. Just as the museum becomes a stage for literal and representative performances of the body, so too does it become a frame or vitrine for historicizing dance.

Had de Zehger and Butler only included choreography by Brown, whose name has more currency with MoMA's typical visitor than other dancers, I might be inclined to agree with Butler's assessment of dance as a spectacle meant to draw more visitors. However, the inclusion of works by Lemon and Le Roy in *On Line* were more challenging for MoMA's founding

²⁵ Marcella Lista, "Play Dead: Dance, Museums, and the 'Time-Based Arts,'" *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 3 (December 2014): 7.

²⁶ The work of Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker is similarly historicized and functions in *On Line* in a fashion akin to Brown's work, concerned primarily with the revival of earlier work that deals with concepts of line, form, geometry, and purity of movement.

²⁷ Brown's *Walking on the Wall* (1971) and *Floor of the Forest* (1970) are perennial favorites for exhibitions that deal with dance and art, appearing even on their own at events like Document and in permanent collections like the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

formalist intentions, wherein modern art (and ostensibly the minimalist dance of Judson alongside it) progressed in a self-determined way through abstraction and into Minimalism. Lemon and Le Roy's work, which is characterized as decidedly postmodern and has few direct ties to the trajectory of Judson Dance Theater, interrogates the viewer in much more kinesthetic, direct, and potentially unsettling ways, allowing it to productively question the relationship of dance to the museum and not, as Bishop accuses, simply exist as mere spectacle.

The Walker Art Center has had a longstanding relationship with Minnesota native Lemon, and so his work has enjoyed some consideration in the contemporary art world, influencing Lemon's approach to the museum setting.²⁸ Lemon's *Untitled* (2008), loosely based on Andrei Tarkovsky's 1972 science fiction film *Solaris*, is a piece in which Lemon and fellow dancer Okwui Okpokwasili explore how memory and mourning reside in the body, shifting and unreliable in time and space.²⁹ When staged at MoMA, the dancers moved through the Marron Atrium in repetitive, unstopping, and frantic movements, crying out and breathing heavily in response to both physical effort and heightened emotion (fig. 7). Already, the bodies of the dancers unsettled the spectator in their raw kinesthetic impact. The choreography, which Lemon calls a "vast emotional landscape where things are never one thing," is a site for embracing multiplicity and coincidence – postmodern dance as an argument against a singular master narrative.³⁰ Lemon states that the concept of collision takes a central role in this piece, and his and Okpokwasili's bodies crashed into one another and threatened to break past the borders of the "stage" and into space around them. The sheer kinetic physicality of the piece became a

²⁸ Bishop, 65, 69; Shannon Jackson in "The Way We Perform Now," *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 3 (December 2014): 54 acknowledges the Walker's longstanding commitment to performance art, though she acknowledges that even the Walker suffers from some of the difficulties in defining roles around dance in the museum.

²⁹ "Performance 14: On Line/Ralph Lemon Jan 26–30, 2011," video from the Museum of Modern Art, 3:35, 2011, <http://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/videos/136/918>.

³⁰ "Performance 14: On Line/Ralph Lemon."

collision between dancer, museum space, and museum audience, an idea Lemon would take further in *Some sweet day*. In the 2011 performance at MoMA, Lemon worked to interrogate the museum as a stage for bodies performing both in its galleries (as in the case of *On Line* or the Marina Abramovic retrospective *The Artist is Present* [2011]) and on its walls. The human body bridged the gap between audience and stage at each audible and tangible moment of impact. Taking place in the atrium, *Untitled* denied the sanctity of the gallery, in which works of art generally hang passively on the wall or stand solemnly in the room. While painting and sculpture can suggest a potential for contact with the viewer, they cannot do so like two human bodies smacking together ten feet away. In activating the museum space, even if only in the somewhat liminal atrium space, Lemon's choreography encouraged interactions between museum visitor and object, even if only implied in the case of something static or purely optical. The latent contact of a dancer's body provokes the reading of kinesthetic potential from the dynamism of a futurist painting or the faces protruding from Jasper Johns' *Target with Four Faces* (1955), and *Untitled* supported de Zegher and Butler's curatorial efforts to associate the act of making and viewing art with bodily experiences.

Le Roy's solo work *Self Unfinished* (1998) presents a less aggressive yet still unsettling and disruptive work. Le Roy's choreography quietly questions the power of the institution, both for dance and art. Le Roy, who holds a doctorate in molecular biology, began dancing and choreographing in 1991, and his trajectory is quite different from most of his peers in the dance world, a fact bourn out in both his choreography and his views on dance's relationship to the museum. At MoMA, *Self Unfinished* began with Le Roy sitting at a table. He robotically stood up and distorted the perception of his body as human through contortionist-like movement and the manipulation of his clothing as he removed it (fig. 8). As his body became different creatures

or pieces of machinery, his human form was abstracted beyond recognition. Because he began dancing later in his life, most would consider Le Roy untrained. The theme of the untrained, pedestrian body harkens back the Judson Dance Theater era, featured prominently at MoMA in the work of Forti, Ranier, Brown, and Steve Paxton. Le Roy, however, proves that an untrained body does not necessarily mean pedestrian, and the complexity of movement and theme in *Self Unfinished* evinces the body's ability to morph our perception, forcing a kinesthetic and at times uncomfortable confrontation between the form before us and our own being. He is himself unfinished, evolving as a mover, an object, and a living being.

In a September 2014 interview with the New York Times, Le Roy states:

I find myself put in situations where I hear, "Ah, so you want to bring dance to the museum," but that's not really my purpose. My remark to this is how can I bring dance to a museum when I was titled a nondance person when I started? If one looks at this work as dance or to see if it's dance, it's very reductive to the potential of many other things, like this notion of time, the individual, what is it to work, the notion of working themes. All of this is there.³¹

Le Roy's statement suggests that the value of dance to museums lies not just in "dancing" bodies and the history of dance as a medium but rather in its potential to choreograph or re-choreograph how bodies move through and understand museums, both as objects and as audience. He further eschews the limiting notion of medium specificity, for even the conception of dance as a specific medium outside of the museum squanders its exploratory potential. His work contrasts starkly with the more stolid "dance" of Brown and her Judson contemporaries that, while valuable for its

³¹ Gia Kourlas, "Some Are Talking, Some Can't Stand Still: Xavier Le Roy's 'Retrospective' at MoMA PS1," *New York Times*, September 26, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/28/arts/dance/xavier-le-roys-retrospective-at-moma-ps1.html?_r=0.

contributions to the shift between Modernism and Postmodernism, never fully renounced medium specificity.

Le Roy's performance in *On Line* also thematized art (here his body as object) changing over time and the spectator's sustained presence as requisite to experiencing that change.³² MoMA exhibited Le Roy and his "untrained body" again on its campus in a 2014 show entitled *Retrospective* at PS1, which highlighted his solo work between 1994 and 2010. Jenny Schlenzka, associate curator at PS1, saw the work at its original venue, Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona, and found in the show how dance "does something to the museum. Choreography can really change your experience, the flow of an exhibition."³³ Because Le Roy's choreographic style and intentions differ from that of the Judson Dance Theater, which seems to subscribe to key ideas of modernism even as it marks a shift towards postmodern dance, dance becomes a museological intervention. Like works of art that fall under the label of "institutional critique," dance is a tool with which one can question the space of the museum and make the lived body present for both performer and visitor. Dance challenges and expands predominant notions of formalist art history, the ephemeral as collectable, and the museum object as being only of the visual arts.³⁴

On Line and its performance component marked a key curatorial shift in MoMA's conception of dance as a participant in a larger narrative of art history. This shift was echoed by other museums, like the 2011-2012 exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art – Boston entitled *Dance/Draw*, which also took the relationship between dancing and drawing as its focus. Curator Helen Anne Molesworth conceived of the body formally in this exhibition, as a line in space. Molesworth saw the relationship between the dancer and the dance or the artist and her

³² Kourlas, "Some are Talking."

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Jackson, 56; Jackson addresses the Walker's acquisition of Cunningham's archives.

thoughts as one-to-one, allowing her to equate the gesture of dance to the gesture of drawing.³⁵ From a curatorial standpoint, there are formal aspects to the moving body and its choreographic structures like line, weight, and composition; and the body and the “object” in both dancing and drawing share aesthetic similarities that assist in theoretically linking the two mediums. By pairing dance so closely with drawing and focusing on formal traits, curators were perhaps also able to avoid addressing issues of temporality, transience, impermanence, and the corporeal inherent in dance. These formalist drives originating in MoMA’s foundational ideas of art history connect dance with visual art in *On Line*. While Lemon and Le Roy’s contributions challenged some of these notions, the majority of the dance shown in the exhibition aligned with traditional curatorial choices and restaged historical work from or indebted to Judson Dance Theater that fits neatly into the story of modern art. Butler and de Zegher’s choices made for a sensible introduction of dance into traditional exhibitions at MoMA. However, MoMA had yet to fully take on dance in its singularity, treating it as worthy of the museum setting in and of itself and, furthermore, as a method for rethinking the very function of the museum.

³⁵ See Helen Anne Molesworth, *Dance/Draw* (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2011).

IV. SOME SWEET DAY

In some respects, the most profound part is the things that MoMA can't predict and control, and the things that we can't predict and control. MoMA, to its credit, from the top down, has been really open to this. But we're opening up a can of worms. Some people will point to the surface layer and say it doesn't work. And my point is, of course it doesn't work. Now let's see, within that, what are the opportunities, what do we discover about it not working? From my point of view, if it's not working that means it works. We know the old model.

-Ralph Lemon³⁶

If *On Line* presented dance as an object with history and characteristics that could affect the museum experience and the depth of understanding for the physical objects within, then *Some sweet day* took the step of ridding dance of any reliance on other objects in MoMA's collection, instead elevating the performances themselves to the very material exhibited. MoMA enlisted *On Line* performer Ralph Lemon to amplify questions of medium, content, and corporeality hinted at in the larger framework of *On Line*. Lemon's curatorial drive consisted primarily of a desire to shake up institutional practice and to find new models for dance and museums. For *Some sweet day*, Lemon co-designed with Jenny Schlenzka a series of dance performances that functioned more like a traditional exhibition, united by overarching concepts and historical frameworks, although comprised of works of dance rather than physical objects. Over three weeks, six choreographers and one sound-based work occupied the spaces of MoMA. Lemon carefully paired the choreographers to create a series of dialogues that exposed historical connections, conceptual differences, and choreographic approaches. Steve Paxton, whose pedestrian-inspired choreography rose to prominence with the Judson Dance Theater in the 1960s, was paired with contemporary French conceptual choreographer Jérôme Bel, whose work is rooted in Judson-era ideas. Contemporary Congolese choreographer Faustin Linyekula and

³⁶ Ralph Lemon, "Ralph Lemon," as told by David Velasco, *Artforum*, October 18, 2012, <http://artforum.com/words/id=35891>.

American experimentalist Dean Moss created newly commissioned work for the exhibition, and pieces by Deborah Hay, another founding Judson Dance Theater member, and Sarah Michelson presented an intergenerational exploration of space and temporality. Though not a dancer, artist Kevin Beasley contributed a two-day sound performance that created an evocative and disruptive soundscape within the museum that was an almost tangible presence. Again, in consideration of space, I will focus on the contributions of Michelson, Beasley, Bel, and Paxton.

Each choreographic work was acknowledged as a stand-alone piece untethered from the museum's collection, but all took place in the museum and thus were they all framed by its architecture, history, and contents. The overarching title and temporal run of the exhibition united the seven pieces assembled to present a visual and kinesthetic discourse that addressed issues of gender, race, aesthetics, and history through movement. The title *Some sweet day* is evocative of a potential future, perhaps where ephemeral and visual art exist together or where these conversations that Lemon sets up need not be given the status of special event or be in contention with the art historical institution. Instead of promoting each performance separately, the publicity material presented *Some sweet day* first and foremost as a singular exhibition, running October 15 through November 4, 2012. And, like a traditional exhibition, Lemon was selected not as an organizer but specifically as a curator, tasked with selecting and preparing specific artists and works around a unifying concept.

The primary venue was again the Marron Atrium, with the performances resonating into multiple spaces in the museum.³⁷ The performances illustrate a desire to bring the fringe world of dance to the museum setting in order to disturb the narrative of visual culture and upset the space in which the objects of that narrative are presented. The exhibition presented a broad range of

³⁷ Bishop, 65; Bishop is quite critical of the atrium space, feeling that it swallows almost all the performances within it.

work that involved different kinds of audience interactions and arrangements, much like a traditional exhibition. The program included restaged works dating as far back as the 1960s and others created specifically for *Some sweet day*, thereby engaging in both historical and present day examples of dance. The museum as a setting allowed Lemon to frame the selected dances as objects in conversation with one another, much like paintings in a gallery. While the curated evening of dance was not a new idea at the time of *Some sweet day* (the Walker Art Center has hosted its annual Choreographer's Evening for over 40 years), Lemon moved dance out of the fringe space of theaters and auditoriums attached to museums and into the galleries. In the Marron Atrium, the relationship between the dance and the theatrical space changed radically. The dances were contextualized as historical objects worth considering collectively in order to observe unifying characteristics such as historical trajectories and stylistic comparisons. Outside the traditional "stage" of dance and instead framed and placed on a pedestal by the museum setting, the liveness of dance was somewhat mediated by the museological practice of categorizing, comparing and historicizing.

The impact and challenges of a dancer/choreographer in a curatorial role are essential to understanding dance as a radical inclusion in the museum. In a recent interview between Danspace Project executive director Judy Hussie-Taylor and Lemon, Taylor asks Lemon about the experience of curating dance and his perspective on the relationship between museums and dance as a result.³⁸ Lemon's insight into curation at MoMA is unique because he is a performer and artist, and he brought with him an approach to *Some sweet day* that sought to agitate the existing model of dance as tangential to narratives of art history. As a curator, Lemon experienced the reconciliation of choreographic content transitioned to a gallery. At a large,

³⁸Judy Hussie-Taylor and Ralph Lemon, "Curation as Choreography." *Theater* 44, no. 2 (May 2014): 99-113.

historical, and object-focused institution like MoMA, Lemon accepted that he could not have everything he asked for, especially in terms of content.³⁹ An effect of curating dance for Lemon was that in the moment of the work's performance, he ceased to be a curator and artist and instead became an audience member.⁴⁰ The role of curator placed him in a position in which he "[watched] the thing being watched. And watching the thing be analyzed, and liked or not, and getting feedback," an experience that he says he does not get as an artist.⁴¹ Lemon became involved in the work as a curator of the visual arts often would not. He arrived at the conclusion that through this dynamic of performance, his role became that of caretaker of the art and of its audience. In the case of dance he was an advocate for an expanded conception of the art object and a spectator's relationship to it, discovering via dance a new form and meaning for an institution committed to preserving and presenting art.

Some sweet day revealed on a practical level the effect of dance's liveness. Lemon faced the task of asking fellow artists to participate in the exhibition rather than going into storage or requesting loans from other collections. By its very nature, dance (excluding here dance for camera, which conceptually functions quite differently than live performance) must be performed by live bodies over a finite period. A curator of dance must also deal with the issues of labor and preservation that complicate the medium. It cannot be pre-installed, and the audience must be there to activate the temporal drive behind dance. In most cases, paintings also ask for very little care from the institution beyond climate controlled spaces, proper care in installation, and occasional conservation, whereas dancers require warm up and rehearsal space,

³⁹ The lack of "backstage" space or a green room for performers is most certainly a design flaw of the Marron Atrium, if it was indeed conceived of as a site for performance.

⁴⁰ Taylor-Hussie, 102.

⁴¹ Ibid, 102.

the ability to voice their desires and needs, and compensation for their time and efforts.⁴² These very real considerations affected the resulting performances in the dancers' presence in the museum before, after, and during the performance. Museum dances also evade the art market, never becoming objects that can be captured and raising questions of dance's literal value in a setting that collects works of distinct monetary worth.

Lemon's observations about the complications of staging dance at MoMA point to the museum's previous failure to incorporate performance-based mediums into its structure, which hindered an earlier arrival of dance and performance in MoMA's history. But the weighty history of formalism and the museum's very space became an additional source of meaning for Lemon's curatorial choices, with the constrictions of the atrium underscoring the at times uncomfortable meeting between dance and the fine art space of MoMA. In a telling coincidence, Faustin Linyekula's *What is Black Music Anyway.../Self-Portraits* and Dean Moss's *Voluntaries* were performed in the Atrium at 1 PM and 4 PM on October 24, 2012 – the same day as the opening of the exhibition *Edvard Munch: The Scream* (October 24, 2012-April 29, 2013). The *Some sweet day* performances were as if a “transgressive” act, as the masses of visitors there on opening day to see the iconic work by Munch were forced to move through the atrium, confronted by moving human bodies on their way to the Munch exhibition in the fifth floor galleries; it was in Lemon's words, an “infiltration at the temple's heart.”⁴³ The galleries of MoMA encircle the Marron Atrium, the veritable heart of the temple, and the atrium is the primary access point to the museum's content. *Some sweet day* became transgressive and

⁴² Lemon hints at this distinction between dancers and paintings in the interview. Valerie Casey also covers the complications for performers as laborers in the museum setting in Valerie Casey, "Staging Meaning: Performance in the Modern Museum," *TDR / The Drama Review*. 49, no. 3: 78-95. This issue is also brought up by Mark Frank and André Lepecki in their introduction to the Dance Research Journal special issue on dance in the museums.

⁴³ Hussie-Taylor, 109.

infiltrative in its interruption of the museum's perceived duty as a site of historical preservation. No longer arrested by stillness and reverence for the relics within, the museum space became destabilized. In fact, the sounds of *Some sweet day* interrupting the opening of *The Scream*, a work which turns on the tension of noise, silence, and movement within its frame, intensified the discomfort and sensory perception encouraged by the work of art.

Lemon also recalled how Kevin Beasley's hip-hop music performance (fig. 9) literally shook the walls of MoMA. The music emitting from his speakers resonated throughout the museum, and though even less of an object exists for music than dance, the sensation and auditory stimulation of booming hip-hop altered the very air of MoMA's galleries. The museum serves as an interstitial site where the art, patrons, and at times performers weave into one another, and not always comfortably so. The white walls of a gallery tend to be perceived as transcendent and liminal spaces upon which art hangs, autonomous from its viewers. To place a live body between the viewer and wall wakes up and engages the expansiveness surrounding a work of art, bringing the viewer into real contact with the works. One no longer stands simply in the *presence* of art but becomes hyperaware of the act of *sharing* space with art. The soundwaves of Beasley's charged and loud music only made the space thicker.

Considering the atrium as an awkward yet productive site, Lemon recalls how for *Devotion Study #3* (fig. 10), Sarah Michelson created a stage that took up the entirety of the atrium, leaving little space for an audience. Michelson essentially refused to deal with the issue of spectators and other museum visitors, instead trying to preserve her medium's traditional spatial arrangement without regard for the museum setting and onsite audience. When Lemon approached Michelson about the problem of audience, he discovered that the tension arose in part because of her desire to make the dance without regard for the viewing of the work.

Devotion Study #3 was partially an attempt to mask the choreographer, and perhaps remove the audience with her, letting the work stand on its own. Michelson had performed *Devotion Study #1*, an intense reproduction of American dance history through the medium itself, at the very visible 2012 Whitney Biennial. For *Some sweet day*, Lemon had given her a prompt – blues music – which originally had nothing to do with MoMA or the atrium but rather the uniting concepts behind the exhibition as a whole. When the expansive atrium became the frame for *Some sweet day*, Michelson was forced to concede her typical practices of installing specialized lights, intricate floor plans, and other technical elements she had used in the past to shape the performance space.⁴⁴ Michelson is known for her tightly controlled choreography and use of space; the size of the atrium, according to Lemon, confounded her.⁴⁵ The sliver left for the audience by Michelson shifted and affected the relationship between the audience and the work’s content, as if the museum setting were an inconvenience. With the atrium itself so restricted, the audience was forced to watch from the openings on the floors above overlooking the performance space. Ironically, by relegating the audience to the upper floors, Michelson essentially recreated the experience of a more traditional theater, the overlooks becoming box seats and balconies for viewing the “stage” below.

In an interview leading up to her January 2014 performance of *Devotion Study #4* at the Whitney, Michelson openly longs for the comfort of the theater and a break from the complexities and frustrations of performing in a museum. Despite the *Devotion* series popularity in the museum setting, the work originated at the Kitchen in New York City, and it is a fringe medium moving from a fringe venue into the mainstream and experiencing growing pains along the way. At MoMA, Michelson learned “the power of the gaze... if you’re in there, you’re in the

⁴⁴ Gia Kourlas, “Q&A: Sarah Michelson talks about her latest premiere,” *Time Out New York*, January 6, 2014, <http://www.timeout.com/newyork/dance/q-a-sarah-michelson-talks-about-her-latest-premiere>

⁴⁵ Lemon, “Ralph Lemon.”

canon and the gaze,” and while her performance there expanded her understanding of what can be done with dance, it also exposed the weightiness and limitations of the institution.⁴⁶

Other choreographers openly and readily embraced the challenge of the atrium. When Lemon invited Jérôme Bel to partake in *Some sweet day*, the French choreographer chose to restage *The Show Must Go On* (2001, fig. 11). After seeing the atrium, he mused with wonder to Lemon about what he might do in that space, implying that the MoMA performance was new territory.⁴⁷ The piece, a seminal work of French conceptual choreography, was well known in the world of dance. But at MoMA, it pressed on issues of theatricality, virtuosity, and audience in a new fashion. *The Show Must Go On* is in its own right a curatorial meditation on movement, “exhibiting” snippets of pop culture and dance.⁴⁸ The soundtrack is a series of pop songs, opening at MoMA with the Beatle’s *Come Together* (typically the third piece of music) and playing through songs like David Bowie’s *Just Dance*, Tina Turner’s *Private Dancer*, and the Macarena.⁴⁹ Like his conceptual predecessors at the Judson Dance Theater, Bel featured a non-dancerly aesthetic in *The Show Must Go On*, and his performers, who wore everyday casual clothing, looked as if they stood up from their seats in the Marron Atrium and walked into the performance arena.

The “dancing” that occurred in *The Show Must Go On* manifested in the form of quotations associated with the cultural style that accompanied a particular song, whether disco, a

⁴⁶ Kourlas, “Q&A: Sarah Michelson.”

⁴⁷ Lemon, “Ralph Lemon.”

⁴⁸ Lista, 16. Lista highlights in particular the way the Bel makes use of the stage as a site for dance exhibition. He seems to conceive of the theatrical space as a gallery in which to present a history of dance and its makers.

⁴⁹ At MoMA, the piece closed with a “sing-a-long” to iPods only the performers could hear. In the stage production, this section was followed by Roberta Flack’s *Killing Me Softly With His Song* and finally Queen’s *The Show Must Go On*.

line dance, ballet, or a scene from a movie.⁵⁰ Indeed, Bel's language and the vocabulary "spoken" by his performers was dictated by these pop songs and their attached memories.⁵¹ Bel's choreography, in its slavish commitment to doing exactly as the music says, invited its viewers to get bored, to wonder if anything has meaning at all, and to consider the meaning of their own participation in these cultural codes. The "pedestrian" movements of Bel's dancers actualized a popular language of dance that exists outside the world of traditional, modern concert dance. The pop music used in *The Show Must Go On*, like one of Andy Warhol's soup cans, produced a set of market-driven songs that invited the performance of a specific kind of dance or induced a certain set of emotions that, when put in Bel's structure, accrued new meaning atop their culturally specific origins.

Once outside the theatrical space and in the Marron Atrium, the performers were closely aligned with the viewers, who might have recognized and recollected the pop music and noticed the similarity in their clothing and bodies trained by pop culture rather than the vocabulary and systems of formal dance. Tim Etchells recalls a conversation with Bel at a bar in Vienna, where Bel told him that he hoped that *The Show Must Go On* would be a work that "*was not stronger than the public*" (emphasis original), though in a stage setting this dream proved impossible.⁵² In theory, the erasure of the frame in the space at MoMA should have equalized the performance, and its audience and should have acted as a provocative site for Bel to explore ideas that inherently reveal and challenge the functions of theatrical and museum spaces. However, though

⁵⁰ Tim Etchells, "The Show Must Go On," *Texts and Interviews - Jérôme Bel*, published April 2002, <http://www.jeromebel.fr/textsandinterviews/detail/?textInter=the%20show%20must%20go%20on%20-%20tim%20etchells>.

⁵¹ For example, when the soundtrack shifts to Reel 2 Reel's track "Move it," the performers respond by literally moving "it" (their bodies), each doing their own version of a club dance move and repeating it ad nauseam for the song's entire three minute and fifty second run. Similarly, the moves of the Macarena, when performed by a dozen dancers for the song's entirety, begin to lose their meaning in their repetition.

⁵² Etchells, "The Show Must Go On."

the frame of the proscenium arch was removed, the frame of the museum itself remained, as the Marron Atrium and MoMA's collection encircled the performance. The new framework of dance in the museum requires that dance be historicized on some level and adds to dance the pressures associated with objects as collectible and part of a larger narrative. Within Lemon's exhibition, the juxtaposition of Bel with his predecessor Paxton highlighted a lineage and established a history for *The Show Must Go On*. The work itself, however, through its heavy reliance on popular culture and its "curated" soundtrack and choreography, was also tied to the act of MoMA's arguably similar curation of modern and contemporary visual culture.

Steve Paxton's seminal postmodern dance works *Satisfyin' Lover* (1967) (fig. 12) and *State* (1968) (fig. 13), performed in the same space in the same week, recall the earlier inclusion of other Judson dancers like Brown, Yvonne Rainer, and Simone Forti in the Performance Program. The two pieces from Paxton juxtapose the same 41 untrained bodies of volunteer performers against the space of MoMA and the audience in the museum's Atrium. The MoMA performers, like those who performed the original works in the 1960s, were given the same set of instructions on how to enter into and move within the performance space. Unlike Michelson, Paxton adhered to more traditional staging conventions, leaving room in the atrium for the audience without separating them entirely from the performance. The performers ranged in age, race, and gender and wore unremarkable clothing, taking on no particular type except perhaps everyday middle class American. In *Satisfyin' Lover*, the performers passed in lines across the space, at times sitting on one of the three chairs that comprise the set while at other times pausing and standing for a moment. In *State*, the performers huddled together, broke apart, and then reformed their group again, offering what New York Times dance critic Claudia La Rocco calls a "myriad of choreographic possibilities" where each of the 41 participants performed his or

her own choreography, thereby contributing to a collective constructed of individual expressions.⁵³

Paxton's pieces in *Some sweet day* presented a logical, flowing relationship in which spectators could identify with the pedestrian movements of non-dancers, thanks to the minimalist qualities perpetuated in Judson-era methods of choreography. Bel's work, inarguably indebted to Paxton's, integrated its audience less easily. The destabilizing effect of nostalgia, pastiche, and jumbled symbols present in *The Show Must Go On* kept its audience at distance, even though at MoMA they shared a physical proximity in addition to the closeness implied in the use of popular music. The juxtaposition of Paxton with Bel actually undermines some of the efforts to canonize Judson under the auspices of MoMA, for the disruptive effect of Bel's work is amplified when placed in conversation with Paxton. Bishop is especially critical of *The Show Must Go On* and how it was reduced in its effectiveness as a self-reflexive and critical work of postmodern dance when removed from a theatrical setting.⁵⁴ However, Lemon was not interested in whether or not these transition from stage to gallery work, but rather in their ability to expose why these transitions might *not* work. This exposure allows for critical analysis of site specificity and the subsequent meaning of a place as a site for dance – here, MoMA and the weight of modernist art history. The pairing of Bel and Paxton matters more than the success of either work.

Despite the lack of objects tied directly to *Some sweet day*, the exhibition provided fodder for accessing the museum and its contents through alternative methods. In an interview with Marissa Perel of Art21, Lemon paraphrases art critic Roberta Smith's description of the

⁵³ Claudia La Rocco, "Standing Still, Saying Plenty," *The New York Times*, published October 18, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/19/arts/dance/steve-paxtons-satisfyin-lover-and-state-at-moma.html?_r=0.

⁵⁴ Bishop, 64.

“awkward immediacy of theater.”⁵⁵ The theatrical nature of dance, when set in the Marron Atrium, highlights a gap created by the stage within traditional venues. The performance is immediate, happening before spectators, and yet through the façade of the “stage,” it remains separated from the “real” world of the spectator. Lemon praises the way in which this uncomfortable awareness, rendered through dance before a museum audience, can be transferred to the paintings on MoMA’s walls. The work and its staging in a museum gallery make visible the act of looking and the body as both object and subject, immediate but not somehow not fully real. The simple structures of the choreography and everyday quality of the performers in Paxton and Bel’s choreography force the spectator to be intensely engaged in his or her surroundings, looking at details and how they differ or remain similar from one performer to the next. The work even allows viewers to turn away from the performers at times and toward one another, working within a frame of kinesthetic awareness, the play of space between audience and body/object. What the work ultimately reveals in its immediacy is a lessening of the gap between processes like dance and painting.

Some sweet day was a bold, experimental approach to dance at MoMA that succeeded more in some ways than others. La Rocco noted that in an exhibition interested in the often-uncomfortable encounter between dance and visual art, Paxton’s work seemed to integrate almost seamlessly.⁵⁶ She closes her review of *Some sweet day* by questioning whether this integration was too seamless and not radical enough, echoing Bishop’s concerns, but ultimately decides to simply accept the success of the exhibition. One should indeed worry over the overarching trend of restaging Minimalist dance. These pedestrian works or Judson era revivals

⁵⁵ Marissa Perel, “Gimme Shelter | Infiltrating the MoMA Atrium: Part 1: An Interview with Ralph Lemon on the Curation of ‘Some sweet day,’” *Art21 Blog*, *Art21*, November 21, 2012, <http://www.art21.org/node/8465>.

⁵⁶ La Rocco, “Standing Still, Saying Plenty.”

are more palatable and approachable to an audience unfamiliar with dance and therefore less subversive works to introduce into the museum space. In order for dance to productively subvert art historical institutions so as to expose new models for presenting culture and theory, it must also expand beyond the obvious periods and forms that have, if rarely, aligned it with the visual arts in the past. However, Lemon and Schlenzka took great care in curating an exhibition with a wider range of choreographers, concerned more with the critical conversations that can emerge, even in failure, than through uncontested successes. Even Paxton's work exposes instabilities in Modernist medium specificity and linear model, existing in a liminal space between Modernism and Postmodernism. *Some sweet day's* iteration of dance performance in the museum setting provided an opportunity to reflect on choices thus far and to see where they pushed at traditional structures and where they found an easy resting place, and Lemon's curatorial offering made way for this line of inquiry in the exhibitions that have followed since.

V. A DANCING MUSEUM

Some sweet day is an old gospel song. The title just felt . . . appropriate. Dance in museums. We've been getting such short shrift, and some sweet day we'll be a part of all of this. Maybe.

-Ralph Lemon⁵⁷

What, then, does dancing in the museum mean for the MoMA of today? Several facets of this relationship bear further consideration. What effect, for instance, might dance-centric exhibitions have on the conception of more standard object-based exhibitions? What issues does MoMA face in the integration and historicization of a live medium into a traditionally static and object-filled space? Must dance remain on the fringe, as museums like the Whitney and the Metropolitan Museum of Art each design separate performance spaces outside the galleries in

⁵⁷ Lemon, "Ralph Lemon."

upcoming building additions? Considering exhibitions of dance at MoMA since 2009, the question arises of whether or not dance performance must remain a part of other exhibitions in order to integrate into the museum setting. Something live resists being historicized, and capturing live art on video and in photographs denies certain essential functions of the medium as historically defined. The variations in how dance has been shown in MoMA – as archival material, in conjunction with other exhibitions, as material for an exhibition in and of itself, and as a part of larger art-historical trajectories – offers a potential hope that dance can be both its own unique entity and part of more traditional presentations. In his interview with Hussie-Taylor, Lemon makes a remark that points to a successful relationship between the museum and dance, stating: “These voluminous museum spaces hold objects, but they’re sometimes interested in holding the ephemeral.”⁵⁸ Similarly, Schlenzka commented to the *New York Times* in an article on *Some sweet day* that “There’s been great performance work at MoMA, but it’s been on the side. We don’t want to go back to the ‘60s, when dance was an alternative to the institution.”⁵⁹ Unlike the 1940s, when dance seemed incompatible with visual art, at least at the institutional level, the rise of performance art since the 1970s has reached a critical mass in the contemporary period where curators, museums, and visitors value performance’s preservation. Exhibitions like *MOVE: Choreographing You* reflect an interest on the part of museums to historicize dance and to include it in the story of the visual arts. This phenomenon may be in part revisionist – an effort to include dance in response to a growing interest in performance at large and increased criticism of formalist art history. However, today’s visual culture and media, from reality television to online social media, is indicative of a society that embraces the post-medium condition and is seemingly more open to the lines of inquiry created by the intersection of

⁵⁸ Hussie-Taylor, 105.

⁵⁹ Claudia La Rocco, “Museum Shows With Moving Parts,” *New York Times*, August 31, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/02/arts/dance/in-some-sweet-day-series-dance-meets-visual-arts.html>.

opposing forms. Questions of preservation, (re)presentation, and exploration are at the core of Lemon's curatorial goals in *Some sweet day* and are taken up by other contemporary choreographers like Trajal Harrel and Boris Charmatz.

The history of dance in the museum continues to evolve, and since *On Line* and *Some sweet day*, the Department of Media and Performance Art has organized two more exhibitions that prominently feature multiple works of dance. From September 2012 to March 2013, *Performing Histories: Live Artworks Examining the Past* honored the Performance Program's commitment to restaging historical works and commissioning new projects. In this way, the Museum of Modern Art attempts to preserve and historicize dance as it would a painting or sculpture. *Performing Histories*, which included the *Fabian Barba: A Mary Wigman Dance Evening*, the ongoing durational *Caravan Project* (1999, 2011, and 2012) by butoh dance giants Eiko and Koma, and a new work by Trajal Harrel entitled *Used, Abused, and Hung Out to Dry* (2013), proves that the curatorial forces at MoMA understand that the structure of dance history also includes key historical works, traceable movements, and new creative voices.⁶⁰

In 2013, MoMA partnered with Boris Charmatz, Director of the Musée de la dance/Centre chorégraphique national de rennes et de Bretagne to present *Musée de la dance: Three Collective Gestures*. Unlike *Performing Histories*, where new and historical works were shown individually, *Musée de la dance* combined several works by Charmatz that presented dance history as embodied within the performers recreating it. Staged in the Marron Atrium (fig. 14) and throughout MoMA's galleries, Charmatz embraced installation and durational enactments of dance. The performances tied into Charmatz's document, the "Manifesto for a Dancing

⁶⁰ MoMA's pattern of staging dance and holding two-day symposia or panels is not without criticism. <http://www.manifestajournal.org/issues/souvenirs-souvenirs/draft-performance-museum-guided-tour#>

Museum,” and its call to treat the museum as a “dancing institution.”⁶¹ The manifesto is radical, demanding a total overhaul of the traditional museum structure that will shift ideas about museums and dance alike. The frequency of discussion surrounding Charmatz, *Musée de la dance: Three Collective Gestures*, and the “Manifesto for a Dancing Museum” in the *Dance Research Journal* special issue clearly denotes Charmatz as the darling of current scholarship on the intersection of dance and the museum.

Charmatz’s popularity stems in part from his efforts to reframe the museum as a living site of critical inquiry and to expand dance beyond traditional notions of theatrical and concert dance. He takes his cues from the body itself, which, long thought in dance to have a literal center, actually has none and is therefore free from trying to find one. Figuratively, this idea extends to dance trying to find a place in the museum or a center for art. He further argues that, as shown in MoMA’s attempts to include dance in its programming, museological practices are responding to the possibilities inherent in theatrical and virtual spaces and trying to embrace the ephemeral and precarious, because these efforts are necessary in ensuring *life* rather than stasis and dead archives.⁶² The very nature of MoMA as a museum founded to archive, historicize, and canonize art means it does not and cannot embrace the ideals of Charmatz’s manifesto except at the cost of the museum’s very function. Still, the numerous articles in the *Dance Research Journal* special issue focused on Charmatz’s manifesto and MoMA exhibition suggest that his efforts are closer to an effective strategy for incorporating dance into museological practices; value exists in the curatorial projects preceding *Musée de la dance* as they set the stage for Charmatz’s experimentation and laid down foundational efforts that contributed necessary discoveries to the question at hand.

⁶¹ Boris Charmatz, "Manifesto for a National Choreographic Centre." *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 3 (December 2014): 45-48.

⁶² Charmatz, 45.

Dance seems poised, both from the perspective of those who make it and those outside it, to take on a larger role in the history of visual culture. Although one must wonder whether museums are the only entities invested in dance, if only for the value of spectacle, the recent influx of scholarship indicates the future to be less bleak. Dance's rise to prominence will come with the shake up of major museums at the hands of dedicated choreographers like Lemon, Le Roy, and Charmatz and curators like Schlenzka, altering the way we view both dance and visual art. True to what Lemon states, the can of worms must be opened and change will only happen upon realizing what does and does not work. When asked in a September 2014 interview whether dance has a place in the museum, choreographer and professor of dance Cynthia Oliver's answer gets at the crux of this relationship as it continues to be defined: dancers have chosen dance's ephemeral form for a reason. The fixed space of the museum is at once problematic and exciting, and dance need not continue to legitimize itself against other forms.⁶³ *On Line* and *Some sweet day* suggest that the museum space is not as fixed as Oliver claims. Bringing dance to the museum thus places dance in conversation with its equals in visual culture, and perhaps, on some sweet day, dance's interventions and methods will revolutionize curatorial practices and create a new language and intelligence that at once destroys and rebuilds the very structure and concept of the museological institution.

⁶³ "Questions of Practice: Cynthia Oliver, Choreographer and Dance Scholar," Vimeo video, 2:01, interview as part of the Philadelphia Museum of Art's *Dancing around the Bride*, posted by Cynthia Oliver, March 11, 2014, http://www.pcah.us/posts/137_questions_of_practice_cynthia_oliver_choreographer_and_dance_scholar

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Figure 1. Flyer for "An Evening on American Dance," c. January 1948 [Dance Archive I.2],
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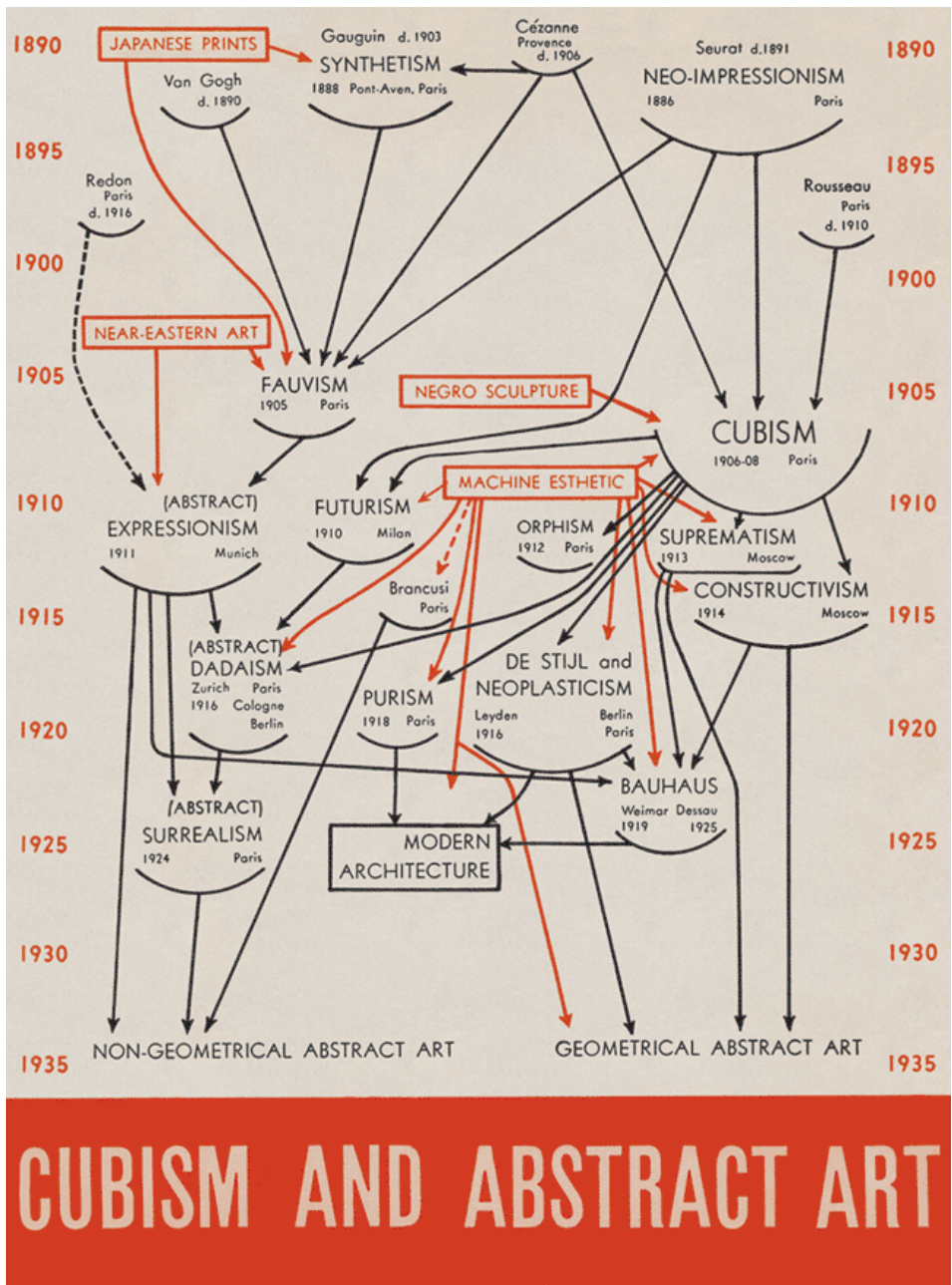


Figure 2. Alfred H. Barr, Diagram for *Cubism and Abstract Art*. 1936.

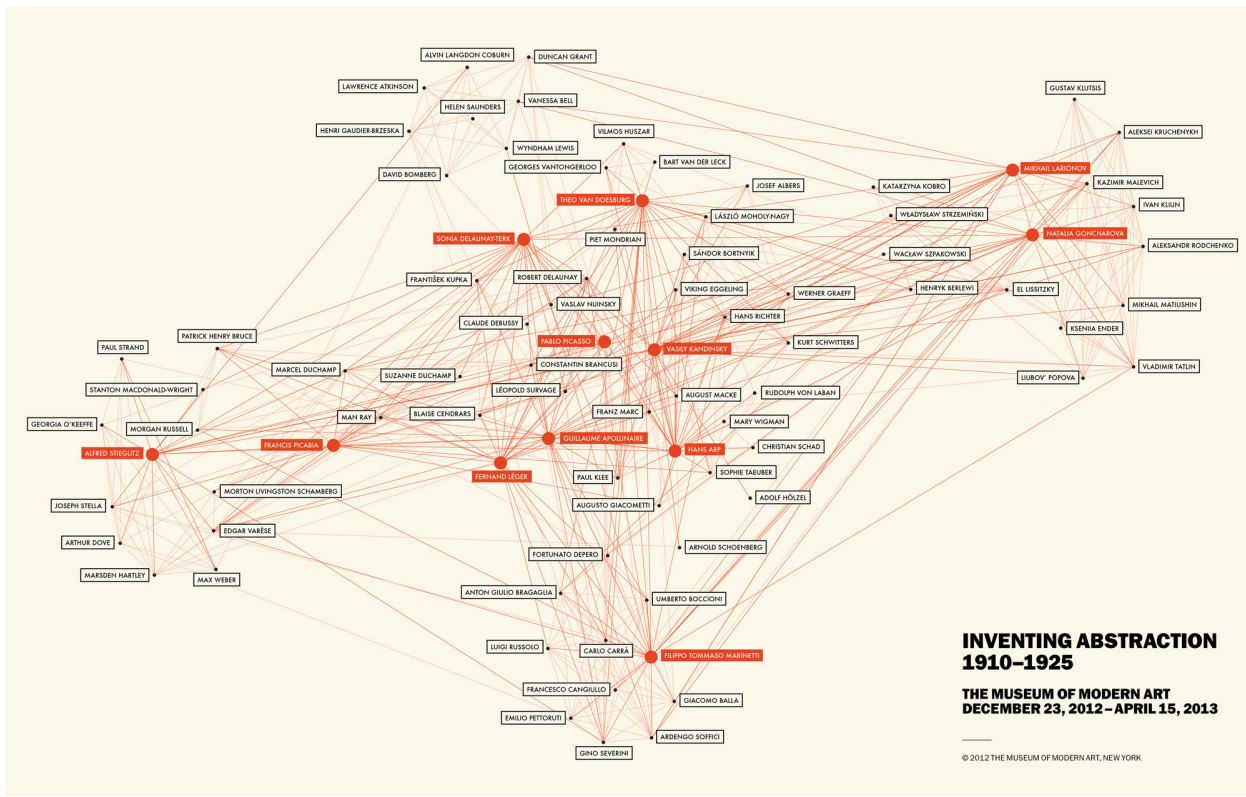


Figure 3. Leah Dickerman's 2012 web for *Inventing Abstraction*.



Figure 4. Trisha Brown Company, *Sticks*, 1973. Performed at the Museum of Modern Art, 2011.

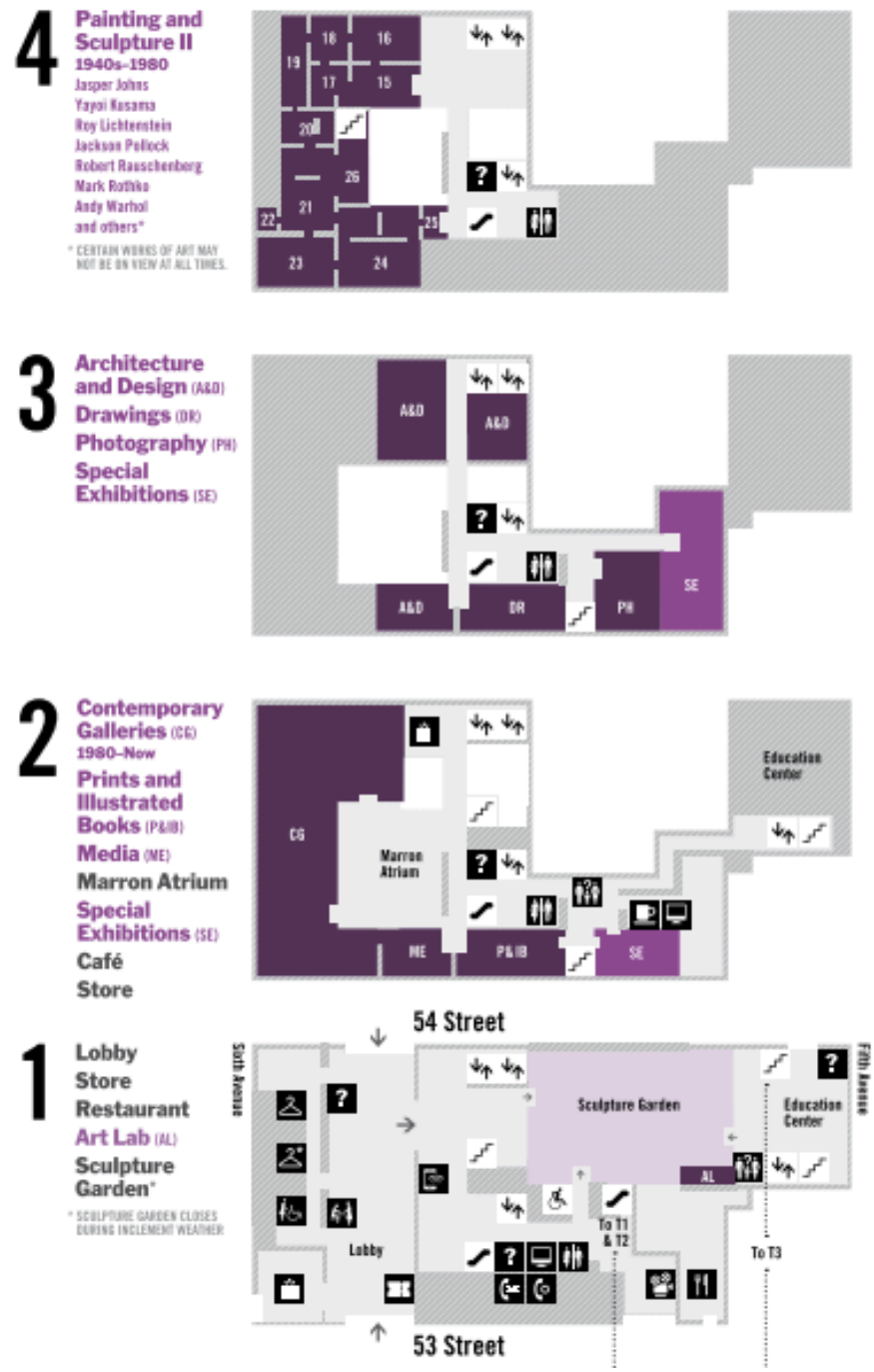


Figure 5. Floor plan of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, N.Y. highlighting the Marron Atrium's multi-level centrality in the galleries and proximity to both special exhibition and contemporary gallery spaces.



Figure 6. Trisha Brown Company, *Roof Piece Re-Layed*, 2011. Performed at the Museum of Modern Art, 2011.



Figure 7. Ralph Lemon, *Untitled*, 2008. Performed at The Museum of Modern Art, 2011. With Okwui Okpokwasili.



Figure 8. Xavier Le Roy, *Self Unfinished*, 1998. Performed at The Museum of Modern Art, 2011.



Figure 9. Kevin Beasley, *I Want My Spot Back*, 2012. Part of *Some sweet day*. Performed at the Museum of Modern Art, October 2012.



Figure 10. Sarah Michelson, *Devotion Study #3*, 2012. Part of *Some sweet day*. Performed at The Museum of Modern Art, November 2012.



Figure11. Jérôme Bel, *The Show Must Go On*, 2001. Part of *Some sweet day*. Performed at The Museum of Modern Art, October 2012.



Figure 12. Steve Paxton, *Satisfyin' Lover*, 1967. Part of *Some sweet day*. Performed at the Museum of Modern Art, October 2012.



Figure 13. Steve Paxton, *State*, 1968. Part of *Some sweet day*. Performed at the Museum of Modern Art, October 2012.



Figure 14. Boris Charmatz, *Flip Book*, 2008. Part of *Musée de la danse: Three Collective Gestures*. Performed at the Museum of Modern Art, 2013.